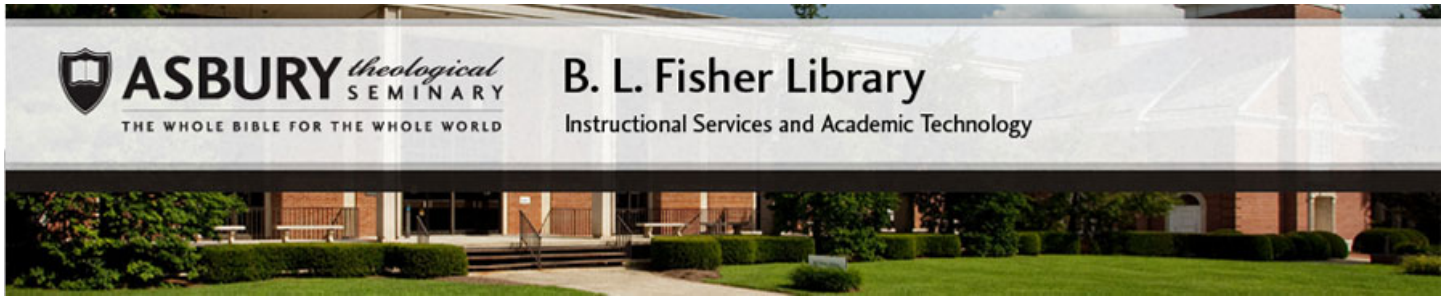

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TOWARD AN UNDERSTANDING

OF CELIBACY IN A CHRISTIAN CONTEXT

FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

presented by

Marilyn Iva Elliott

has been accepted towards fulfillment

of the requirements for the

MASTER OF ARTS IN THEOLOGY degree at

Asbury Theological Seminary

Wilmore, Kentucky

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April 29, 1998
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Toward An Understanding
Of Celibacy In A Christian Context
For The Twenty-First Century

by

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A thesis

submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts, Theology

Asbury Theological Seminary

May 1998

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INTRODUCTION

During the past eighteen years of pastoral ministry in Protestant evangelicalism in Canada, I have become increasingly aware of the plight of single Christians in local churches. Existing somewhere in 'no man's land', these saints find themselves relegated to a place defined by what they are not: not married, not stable, not wanted, incomplete. Unchecked assumptions about their lives and their maturity diminish their credibility. Often a single person's motivation toward an unfitting marriage is simply an effort to become a valued part of the community. It seems the Canadian Protestant church prefers its members married.

The number of single and 'single again' folk in the church has grown, and is still growing. One can expect that many North Americans will be single at some point in their life. Often coming to faith in Christ mid-way through life, singles bear the wreckage of broken relationships, the scars of a low trust, low commitment culture. The seats of a growing church burgeon with divorced, widowed, separated and single persons.

The official ecclesiastical position on sexuality remains fixed on the ideal of abstinence apart from marriage, with the ideal being one marriage only. Apart from this general ideal the Church offers little guidance. Too often teaching on singleness focuses on controlling or negating sexual impulses, rather than grappling with the possibility that one might submit their sexuality to God as a force for the kingdom. Plainly, single people are not perceived as obvious candidates for great souled saintliness. With no real understanding of the value of singleness to the kingdom of God, the Church can only

plead for genital sexual abstinence outside of marriage and provide social events through which one can seek a mate. Having overlooked the rich stream of motivation for celibacy that comes from authentic Christian spirituality, the Protestant evangelical church speaks from an impoverished position when it speaks on this issue.

The church's position of abstinence, (when not supported by spiritual motivation), appears to many to be unreasonable. One need not look far to find Christians who, while acknowledging the *ideal* of abstinence, permit personal exemptions that allow them engagement in active sexual behavior that lies outside the ideal. Those who endeavor to maintain sexual purity by living the Christian standard often find their lives beset by loneliness.

The single life is suspect, not celebrated for its potential gift to the kingdom. In the Christian and Missionary Alliance, of which I am a part, single people are rarely trusted with significant pastoral roles, male missionaries are denied a second term on the foreign field unless they marry, and "single again" persons are denied many levels of leadership. Even were these persons to remain celibate and conduct themselves in an irreproachable manner, they are not deemed 'safe', let alone holy. A tangle of theology and opinion spins around the volatile issue of human sexuality. Spoken and unspoken ideas imported from culture and church tradition have all contributed their particular 'twist', effectively convoluting the issue until it has become perplexing and controversial.

Through the ages, the Christian church has undergone huge fluctuations in its theologies of human sexuality that necessarily undergird attitudes toward marriage and singleness. On examination, it becomes apparent that theology at times widely diverges

from Scriptural teaching. Remnants of these various views are still mixed in with current theology, leaving deep questions: Is celibacy at odds with intimacy and sexuality?; Is celibacy simply asceticism?; It is the lifestyle for those who are sexually repressed?; Does it accomplish a higher state of holiness?; Is it only for Roman Catholics?

Buried beneath layers of misunderstanding and politics are significant truths needing to be recovered. The norm must be established again, through Scripture. Only then can the morass of church dialogue and praxis move out of the shadow of passionate personal conviction and be sorted through in useful ways. This study is seeking Scripturally sound, life-giving Christian insights into celibacy that might provide help for single, celibate living.

Whether the "single" experience spans an entire life or just a short time, whether it comes before or after marriage[s], or whether one's interest lies in professional vocational ministry or not, singleness is valuable to Christ for the 'sake of the Kingdom.' The Church's blessing must rest on these persons, whose lives can bring the presence of Christ near, or it will forfeit a great strength.

1. Problem Statement

This thesis seeks to understand the celibate life in the historical Christian context, with the purpose of discovering what of that is Scriptural and life-giving and might provide helpful insights for single life in the 21st century Protestant evangelical church.

Sub-Problems:

a) How do the Scriptures present celibate life? (An overview.)

b) How has celibate life been understood in significant Christian eras?

c) Analysis of these specific meanings and motivations in light of the Scriptural 'norm'

d) Which of these positive, Scriptural principles and lifestyle patterns need to be renewed to the Protestant evangelical church of the 21st Century?

2. Hypothesis

a) Lost within the morass of distortion on the subject of human sexuality, there still remains a rich vein of thought regarding Christian celibate life.

b) The 20th century Protestant church has forfeited an element of spiritual strength for the kingdom of God by failing to understand and empower the gift of celibacy among its membership.

c) Theological dialogue at all levels of ecclesiastical life will assist in releasing the gift of celibacy within the church. As assumptions based on distorted 'Christian' thinking are exposed, wholesome, Scriptural theology of sexuality can emerge.

3. Delimitations

This study is not an attempt to deal with the continuing controversy over Sacerdotal celibacy.

The early historical examination will focus on the first four centuries, since during this time a proliferation of ascetic teaching radically changed the Christian theology of human sexuality. The victory the ascetics won in this time of intense debate color the motivations of virgins and celibates for centuries. The presence of the first injunctions of celibacy imposed upon clergy also demonstrates the significance of this period.

The Protestant Reformation is a second important theological junction, marking a widespread rejection of institutionalized celibacy and providing a trajectory toward current theology.

For the modern church experience, the Christian and Missionary Alliance will be the sample group, as it is the one in which I live.

4. Theoretical Framework

Presuppositions:

a) Scripture will be used and understood to be authoritative and normative.

b) Considering the above, church tradition is not equal in authority to scripture, but rather is subject to it. Thus the teachings of early church fathers are subject to Scripture.

c) Church tradition is understood to inform decisions and attitudes of the church, even when they are not clearly articulated.

Definition of Terms:

Celibacy: *Celibacy* is derived from the Latin word, "*caelebs*", which means "alone", or "single". To live *celibate* is to live in some way alone, or not coupled. Christian celibacy is, historically, a "vowed" life. It is a commitment to live alone for the sake of Christ and the Kingdom of God. This thesis uses the term to indicate single life motivated by spiritual goals and marked by sexual purity. This life may or may not be formed by a vow, and may cover only a limited time (between, before or after a relationship) or a complete lifetime. A celibate need not be a virgin.

Chastity: *Chastity* is a virtue required of all believers who desire to live the life of Christ. It concerns submitting one's sexuality to the service of God, and practicing sexual activity within the constraints of Christian living. One might be *chaste* in marriage or in celibate life. *Chaste* living includes the proper expression of sexuality as well as its restraints. Not every *chaste* person is celibate.

Virginity: A *virgin*, by narrow definition, is one who has not engaged in genital sexual relations. The *religious* concept of *virginity* from the historical Christian understanding, however, goes beyond the physical dimension and necessarily engages the spiritual. To be a true *virgin of the church*, one must be living a life of faith. To hold the honor of *Christian virginity*, one must have integrated one's physical (sexual) life with her spiritual life. (Men are seldom referred to in this way in the religious context.) The current fancy

that one remains a "technical" *virgin* who has not engaged in *actual* sexual intercourse (genital penetration) but has lived an unchaste life, is not valid within this religious framework A religious *virgin* is a celibate who has not experienced genital love because of a choice of faith. (See Goergen, Chapter 5, pp. 125,6) In this thesis the concept of *virginity* can be understood with or without a vow, and is not intended to indicate a lifetime commitment. (Since there are currently no such vows existing in the evangelical Protestant church, it is a moot point to discuss *virginity* and *celibacy* only in the context of such a vow.)

Continence: *Continence* is control, specifically the self-restraint of one's own actions or feelings. Although it can simply mean moderation, in the context of sexuality from a Christian perspective, *continence* refers to complete control over sexual activity through abstinence. A *continent* person need not be a virgin, nor need they be single. There exists the possibility of a '*continent marriage*' wherein both parties agree to abstain from sexual relations and participate in the marriage, as brother and sister.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The issue of celibacy is *not* a hot topic of discussion in the Protestant evangelical church. Indeed, most thinking and writing on the subject come as afterthoughts alongside issues deemed more important: marriage, divorce, pastoral care, etc. There appear to be few truly *Christian* insights; almost "no theology of singleness" resides in Protestant

evangelicalism (Cornes 85). Singleness from a pastoral care perspective is often a matter of finding something 'to do' with this awkward group. The dearth of dialogue is interesting considering the sheer number of single people in Protestant churches. "One of the most conspicuous changes in the modern Western world," says Andrew Cornes, "is that more and more people are living single lives" (84). According to 1989 statistics, nearly one quarter of all households lodge one person alone (*U.S. News and World Report*, August 3, 1987). Attendance records affirm this trend to be visibly evident in church demographics.

Cornes states that churches have been "positively unhelpful in this area" (85). He sees a serious problem in the attitude of churches which prefer its people married. Agreeing with a sermon preached by John Fischer, Cornes flags the Christian view that "it is impossible to be a mature Christian without being married" (86). The *Church Times*, (January 1990), laments that every church wants a married clergy, preferably with children (86). Western Protestantism shows very little sympathy for or theology of singleness, and perpetuates the feeling among singles that they have failed somehow in life, or been cheated by it (86). Cornes goes to length to demonstrate that the Biblical view of sexuality places singleness in a positive light: as good as marriage; useful; positive and a doorway to richness of life (125,6,7). Condemning the idea that singleness is a lower level existence for a Christian, Cornes promotes it as a "jewel" needing to be "rediscovered by the Church, by individual Christians, and by society today" (128). In his discussion he avoids the use of the term 'celibate', interestingly enough.

Helmut Thielicke, in *The Ethics of Sex*, portrays sexuality as more than simply biology, but as *essentially human*, and thus not able to be isolate dealt with separately from the person as a whole. Because sexuality is *human*, through and through, the "biological aspect is thoroughly integrated in the *humanum;* and the *humanum* lives and moves and has its being in the *divinum"* (Thielicke 19). Sexuality is not an autonomous force within the person, but rather "a mode of the being and functioning of the one, whole, indivisible man, who as this one, whole, indivisible man is from God, to God, and under God . . . [T]he biological and the personal sides of his being interpenetrate each other, point to each other, and cannot be understood at all apart from their correlation with each other." (18) In this framework of thought, every person is a sexual being, married or not (17). "Therefore, the theological ethics . . of sex [can]not be treated only within the framework of marriage." (17) The 'being' and the 'function' of the human person cannot be disconnected. In the case of sexuality, the immediacy of the 'being' and 'function' is extreme (22). To attempt to isolate and negate sexuality is to significantly violate the human person. The necessity, then, is to deal with the issue of human sexuality even where life is lived single. Sexuality plainly cannot be abjured; when denied it simply diverts to a more oblique form of expression.

Thielicke uses this argument to explain why "moral appeals to the will" have very "limited effectiveness" when dealing with sexual temptation (74). "The Law proves to be powerless in a very significant way." (74) The problem, as Thielicke sees it, is not that the will is powerless over the potential of sexual urges, but that the will is, *itself*, complicit with the temptation. It is not a matter that . . .

> [m]y will is too weak; but rather: I am too weak to allow my will to exert itself; in reality I do not "will" at all . . . and the fact is that I cannot will to do so. My trouble is not that my will is subject to the impulse, but rather that it is bound up with it and I cannot break the connection. (pg. 75)

Thielicke states that one cannot deal with the lure of sexuality by strict rules or determination of will, since it is not something "*in* man that comes into conflict with *something else in* him [speaking of the 'flesh and the spirit']; rather the *whole man* is involved in a contest as to whether he wants to belong to *sarx* or to *pneuma,* to God or to this world" (74, 75). The solution, accordingly, is not engagement of will, but "gaining another *bond* to which my existence is tied, which in turn will replace the mere desire with another kind of mindset, another kind of seeking" (75). If one is relating "simply and solely to sexuality, then [they] fall into the . . . mercy of [sarx]. If one lives wholly in trust and love toward God himself, then out of this relationship their being is "decisively determined" toward the divine (76).

Sexuality is essential to humanness. Sexual differentiation is "so constitutive of humanity that . . . it appears as a primeval order . . . and endures as a constant despite its depravation in the Fall" (3). The ground and goal of man's being as determined by God is as "being in fellow-humanity", and immediacy to God. Clearly the sexual aspect of a human person, particularly as it contributes to the drive toward 'I-thou', is integral to a whole selfhood: in relationships, and in actions. In pursuing a theology of singleness then, the sexual nature must be accounted for and given validation.

LaCugna further develops the idea that "being in fellow-humanity" is, at least in part, rooted in one's sexuality. She states that "[s]exual life is the most conspicuous way

that human beings express themselves both as persons and as persons who naturally seek communion" (LaCugna 406). She agrees with Thielicke that sexuality, an inherent feature of the human person, is present whether or not genital sexual function is in play. In sexuality LaCugna sees a force driving toward union, community. "Distinct from both sex (gender) and sexual activity, sexuality is a continual reminder that we are persons designed for union with other persons." (406)

Developing the idea that sexuality is a constant reminder to the human person that they cannot exist entirely for themselves, LaCugna argues that a 'catholic' sexuality transcends exclusivity and becomes, with growing inclusivity, "iconic of divine life, [truly] imag[ing] . . . the very nature of the triune God" (407).

Sexuality, which is able to point directly at the personal nature of God is capable of being expressed in Godlike or un-Godlike ways.

> . . . [S]exuality is also a vital path of holiness, creativity, fecundity, friendship, inclusiveness, delight and pleasure. Sexuality can be a sacred means of becoming divinized by the Spirit of God instead of a tool to exercise control over others, or an aspect of ourselves to be feared and avoided. Alienated or alienating expressions of sexuality, practices that are truly 'unnatural' in the sense of being contrary to personhood, contravene the very life of God. In contrast, fruitful, healthy, creative, integrated sexuality enables persons to live from and for others. (407)

Donald Goergen, himself a celibate at the time of writing, offers a clear delineation between *genital* sexuality and *affective* sexuality. Goergen's discussion of sexuality begins with the idea that a *sexual* person is a sexual *person* (Goergen 51). Human sexuality is not animal sexuality, limited to instinct, biology and generativity. Human sexuality, while including sexual differentiation, includes an intense relational aspect: being

structured *for* another, incomplete in isolation, and inescapably social (51). Rather than simply being genital and biological, human sexuality is filled with relational possibilities.

The *genital,* or sensual current of sexuality, while certainly flashy, is not the core of human sexuality. The *affective* current is determinably rooted in relational and social drives, in attraction for other people (52). Emotional bonding, tenderness, affection, compassion and human warmth flow from healthy *affective* sexuality. These community building aspects of sexual behavior can occur without *genital* sexuality. *Affective* sexuality builds community. It is only when sexuality becomes *genital* that it becomes exclusive.

Sexuality is common to all, married or single. Marriage expresses its vocation of love for God in an exclusive relationship. Celibate life expresses its vocation of love for God in a compassionate, universalized love for humankind. Both lifestyles, when lived well, require a healthy personal attitude toward one's own sexuality. To be celibate is to have one's genital *expression* of sexuality set aside, it does not mean withdrawal from intimate relationships (172). The choice to set aside conjugal love is not a choice away from emotional fulfillment (178). A healthy celibate is not genitally *repressed.* A genitally *repressed* person is, of necessity, an affectively repressed person, and thus not able to 'socialize' their sexuality (57). An attempted negation of one's sexuality dams the flow of strength needed for virtuous, celibate life. A truly chaste, celibate person

> has a healthy attitude towards his or her sexuality . . . has a good feeling about his maleness or her femaleness and about his or her sexual responses . . . has an ability to relate bodily on the sexual level . . . exhibits kindness, understanding, openness, and imagination . . . A person who is uncomfortable being sexual is not chaste. A

> chaste person is a sexual person and is a supreme exemplification of what it means to be sexual. (98)

The human person cannot escape the inherent sexual nature of being 'in community'. When sexuality develops toward a 'catholic' way of expression, it propels a person from a predominantly self-focused posture to a healthy focus on others (77). In this sense, all human relationships are sexual, even as all human persons are sexual. But not all human sexual relationships are genital, nor are all necessarily affective. One can engage in genital sexuality without the affective element, just as one can engage in affective sexual relationships without moving into genital relationships.

Goergen finds Freud's distinction of sexuality and genitality to be helpful, but strongly disagrees with Freud's notion of genital superiority (53). Freud's idea that the "affectionate current" of sexuality is simply "aim inhibited" genital sexuality, rising for lack of genital satisfaction, is outrightly rejected by Goergen.

> "Socialization and not tension reduction is the primary goal of our sexual lives. . . The affective dimension is the totality of affection, friendship, and tenderness of life. This is the area exhibited in compassionate people who are not only able to socialize their sexuality but in rare cases universalize it." (54)

Although man's striving after intimacy and striving after genital satisfaction are not entirely distinct, they must not be conflated. "Affective and genital sexuality are distinguishable but not separable, different yet related" (58). Sexual intercourse does not necessitate genital activity. Conversation, human affection, warmth and sympathy are all affective aspects of human sexual intercourse, in that two (or more) sexual persons are engaging one another in a personal manner.

Good in theory, but does it work, practically? Can affective sexual expression deepen without coming under the tyranny of genital drives? Jane Gustafson, herself a celibate, wrestles intimately with this question in her book, *Celibate Passion.* She attacks the unappealing understanding that celibacy leaves one "unripe, . . . incomplete, . . . unloved, . . . sober, somber, bloodless, . . . [and is] a virtue which represses or denies my basic sexuality" (Gustafson 73). Combining the idea of celibacy with that of *passion,* which she admits is often viewed as being "mortally sinful: [full of] concupiscence, lust, [and] libido", Gustafson affirms that her "celibacy has got to be passionate, and [her] passion, [the] desire for union with another, must have its celibate dimensions" (74).

She argues that erotic passion must be present in every person striving to be more religious and more human. Such passion is a "push, a drive from within, an energy which moves me into relationship with others. It is an intense thirst for intimacy, a yearning for real living, which at the same time affirms and accepts me as separate and individual" (74). In this, it seems, she is affirming what Goergen affirms, that the affective side of the human drive is integral to one's sexuality. Gustafson sees the drive of eros to be a "passion for relationship; . . . the desire for goodness as much as union and communion" (74). She separates this from the libidinous drive, which is the biological drive toward coitus. Suggesting that the "man-woman relationship that is erotic but not coital could be the greatest single witness to society of the inadequacies of mere libido," Gustafson begins to develop a theology of "sign", that is, a sacramental aspect of celibacy. The sign before the world is a witness to "perpetual neediness before God. . . Human solutions to our

needs do not satisfy us. God alone can satisfy, and he will always fill the person who is in need" (87).

After asserting that celibacy is not a choice to remain emotionally unfulfilled, Gustafson begins to look at what a specific spiritual friendship might look like. It is here that she makes some of her finest points, and her most naive. Eros seeks no termination, no absorption, and therefore it stimulates one to greater union, deeper intimacy. In contrast, lust lulls one to sleep, having been satisfied (76). Condemning the "exploitive" way of sex so prevalent in our society, Gustafson speaks of Jesus whose

> love is fully sensuous and spontaneously tactile. But it centers on whole-personed intimacy and relishes each expression of communication as an end in itself. The effects of such love are stunning. His erotic love for Magdalen irreversibly shocks her from libido. His passion arouses others from their apathy.
>
> Erotic celibate passion involves a leisurely attitude toward another which does not seek to dominate or exploit. It necessitates a contemplative reverence for the beloved and an acceptance of each expression of intimacy for itself, with no thought of inevitable progression. (80)

Suggesting that abstinence from intercourse is one such expression of 'leisurely love-making', Gustafson proposes that married people refrain from orgasm during coital love for the sake of 'leisure'. This idea is hard to accept. She goes on to say that celibate love-makers must, of necessity, leave one another 'virginal' and *in some way* untouched, keeping a sacred area reserved for God alone. However, this area "may or may not be physical; it may perhaps be psychological or spiritual" (84). The religious definition of virginity involves more than abstinence from genital sexual activity, but it certainly cannot mean less. One must wonder if there are no physical boundaries, what indeed is celibate life?

Quoting Victor Frankl that "where sexuality is possible, love will desire and seek it, but where renunciation is called for, love will not necessarily cool or die," Gustafson quite rightly affirms that both unmarried and married lovers can come to genuine intimacy with each other (88). Celibate friendship is a deeply affective bond that has at its core the spiritual life. It is not completely platonic, escaping erotic elements. But how this intimacy expresses its love in the physical realm without doing violence to the spiritual commitment seems to be unclear.

Sam Keen, popular author on spirituality and a 'recovering Presbyterian' (his term) sets out in a deliberate attack against traditional Christian boundaries. His desire to "recover passion" for a life apparently dulled by Christian religion cost him a marriage and a faith (Keen 163). He writes of the journey toward 'spirituality' and away from taboos in his book, *Hymns to An Unknown God.* Although Keen overstates his view that "the Judeo-Christian tradition has consistently viewed woman, nature, and the sensual body as of lesser importance and dignity than man, history, and the life of the mind," he rightly points out the dichotomy between spirituality and sexuality in this tradition (157). Endeavoring then, to find a way into "sacred sexuality" a variety of personal sexual encounters emerge. In describing a two year affair, Keen says, "[B]etween us it was bodies that mattered. Who we were or had been or might become wasn't important" (165). That this type of engagement is sexual seems undeniable, but that it is spiritual remains in question.

Keen agrees with the above authors that the "I" desires to become "We", that to "be a self is to search for self-transcendence" (172). Upon stating that "flesh is a parable

of spirit," Keen promotes sexual expressions of all kinds (even orgies) to be symbolic acts of deep communion. Like the longing for metaphysical fulfillment (the spiritual quest), sex, (the longing for physical fulfillment) "is built into the human condition" (174). The longings that are spiritual and sexual "are driven by the same ontological longing, the same need for belonging" (175). To be swept away from aloneness, and returned back to our own self is the 'dance' humans desire. In such a rhythm the sexual and spiritual hungers find satisfaction.

> The love game and the spirit game seem to have the same rules: It takes two to play, a self and an other. The game comprises of alternating movements that repeat, ad infinitum. Self and other move toward and away from each other. The One becomes Many, and the Many become One, ad infinitum. I and Thou become We, and We become I and Thou. (176)

Speaking of sexual encounters as "sacred lovemaking", or "epiphany", Keen claims that physical surrender brings both persons to "something beyond the relationship," and "increases each person's momentum toward consciousness, compassion and communion" (177). This transcendence is contingent upon maintaining respect for the other's separateness.

> When lovers meet with respect for the mystery of their separateness, they may, in coming together, suddenly experience lovemaking as a sacramental dance, an outward and visible sign of the invisible grace that unites the single self to the communion of Being. (178)

Although flowing with religious language, Keen has clearly abandoned a Christian perspective on the sacredness of sexuality. He has also abandoned the distorted "Christian" perspective that sex is sin and needs to be expunged from the human person. But rather than struggling with the ambivalence surrounding sexuality and spirituality,

Keen has embraced a "Tantric" spirituality. "By recognizing and stimulating . . . inherent sensual spirituality . . . an energy is released that is evolutionary and 'upward motivated'. We learn to use this energy for pleasure, for achieving our worldly goals, and for aiding our spiritual evolution." (Douglas 3) Sexual and spiritual, yes -- Christian, no. Keen has cast off all but the 'poetry' of the faith.

Taking a different approach to the same issues, Elizabeth Stuart and Adrian Thatcher (*People of Passion*) seek to remain *inside* the faith. Claiming to be about the work of telling the reader "what Christians have said, and are now saying, about sex," this book outlines what the authors see to be an extensive *Christian* understanding of sex (Stuart 1,8). Their dialogue is framed under the rubric of a "passionate ethic", or sharing of the passion of Christ which is love of God and neighbor (46). This passionate ethic identifies with "the pastoral realities of the lives of sexually active Christian men and women," eschewing the "proclamations" of ecclesiastical authorities that lack "emphatic identification" (46).

Passionate ethic is contextualized various ways. Early in their book they deal with the "simple and traditional" demand that Christian sexual activity limited to marriage. Claiming that the age at which persons marry has risen, they pose the question: "Do the churches seriously assume that women and men will not have sexual intercourse until then?" (3). Assuring the reader that procreation is no longer a part of the equation because of contraception, Stuart and Thatcher suggest that love making been seen in a new light, "valued for its own sake" (3).

Passionate ethics "is wary of the traditional virtue ethic because of the later's preference for starting with the cardinal virtue of temperance, rather than justice" (48). Chastity (a value of temperance) for example, is a negative ability to moderate desire, rather than a focus on the common good, and just relationships. Moderation is good if not aimed toward desire but toward injustice (for example, the injustice to a life brought into the world unwanted). Claiming that virtues need to be malleable, Stuart and Thatcher encourage churches to be creative in their flexibility (49).

Linking sexuality with spirituality, Stuart and Thatcher transfer a spiritual pattern of growth (normal, reaching out to others, purification, illumination and union) to sexual growth. Using the term, "embodied holiness", they "relocate salvation in and through the body. [As] our alienation from our bodies is healed and we experience the saving grace of God within them, . . . [g]race becomes enfleshed . . . and it reaches out to us through other fleshy creatures" (98). In discussing how this holiness might become embodied, (following the spiritual pattern), the authors suggest: first, "relaxing into self-affirmation that is deeply grounded in divine grace" as one comes to know their sexual orientation; second, a "summons to other people" and the exploration of sexual arousal and contact; third, "letting go of individual and social sins," specifically patriarchy and homophobia; fourth, illumination (compassion) toward distant neighbors who are "victims of social and economic injustice," and fifth, union with all creatures through a justice ethic (237 -- 240).

Through this pattern of growth, Stuart and Thatcher present the body as "a precondition of all knowledge and love whatsoever," engaging the neighbor who is

immediate, then near, and then distant (241). Christians as sexually embodied beings necessarily express their spirituality through their bodies, "flowing outward in love of God and neighbor" (241). This discussion of sexuality and spirituality does not shed much light on the celibacy issue. It does not conceive of sexuality that is not genital at some stage, or of human outreaching that is not sensual. One must question whether this work speaks for the Christian on matters of sexuality and spirituality.

The confusion and struggle underway among thinkers in and around the Christian faith clearly demonstrate the depth of the issue. Sexuality and spirituality are two vital core elements in every human person. The question remains how to integrate and expressed both in the life called to singleness and celibacy.

Returning to Helmut Thielicke in the *Ethics of Sex*, it seems clear that this is a matter greater than simply one aspect of human choice. It engages the entire person, biological and spiritual, interpenetrated and correlated (Thielicke 18). As Thielicke says, "The whole man is involved in a contest as to whether he wants to belong to *sarx* or *pneuma*" (74). In this choice alone is the possibility of "gaining another bond to which [one's] existence is tied, which in turn will replace the mere desire with another kind of mindset" (75).

One can, without difficulty, understand how a theology of 'sex as sin' developed in Christian thought. To embrace sexuality as integral to God-imaged humanity is to raise complex and troubling issues. But the violation effected through efforts to isolate and expunge sexuality is costly as well. LaCugna's belief that sexuality is "a vital path of holiness, creativity, fecundity, friendship, inclusiveness, delight and pleasure" raise the

stakes on the side of wholesome sexuality for every Christian person, celibate, single or married (409). In "living God's life with one another," a deep intimate communion and friendship with God and other persons is potential fuel for spiritual ministry (411). How this fits into the particulars of a holy life is the pressing issue.

SCRIPTURAL OVERVIEW

One way to open the Scriptures on this topic is to try to understand some of the broad Judeo-Christian views of sexuality presented therein. Of these, five significant ones are: the *Yahwist* gift of sexual differentiation to remedy loneliness (derived from the Genesis 2 account of creation); the mutual passion found in the *Song of Songs*; a *Gospel* orientation, (taken from Matthew's gospel) which focuses on kingdom priorities; the affective sexuality displayed in *Jesus' life*; and the doctrines of sexuality and singleness derived from the writings of *Paul the Apostle* (Goergen 13).

1. Yahwist

The Yahwist view, present in the most ancient theology, is foundational in Christian tradition (Goergen 14). Central to this theology is Yahweh, the creator God who remains faithfully involved with the people he has covenanted to love. In the Genesis 2:15-25 account of creation, God seeks to resolve Adam's loneliness by the gift of a suitable helpmate. The loneliness of the Adam-man is the concern of the creator. In woman, God creates the compliment to Adam's sexual nature, and gives him a partner who, like him, seeks union with another. "[T]he relationship of fellow humanity, represented by the man-woman relationship, is emphasized and given privileged status over against all I-It relationships"

(Gen.2:20) (Thielicke 4). The man, recognizing this, shares with her his own name, calling her "Woman" (Gen.2:23).

Sexuality, appreciated and shameless, functions in the context of fellowship, not propagation nor eroticism. As a gift of creation, sexuality originates in the mind of God. It is specifically for the relational good of man. Initially a part of creation, sexual differentiation endures the crisis of the Fall, "except that it becomes a *disturbed* relationship. . . .Even in the distorted state . . . the indestructible correspondence of the sexes remains; the distortion occurs, so to speak, 'within' this correspondence" (Thielicke 13). The acts of God in Redemption address this distortion, with the aim to re-create the relational solidarity of man and woman.

2. Song of Solomon

The Song of Solomon presents a much more erotic view of sexuality. Moving beyond simple appreciation, sexuality is celebrated (Goergen 16).

Upon my bed at night
I sought him whom my soul loves;
I sought him, but found him not;
I called him, but he gave no answer.
I will rise now and go about the city
in the streets and in the squares;
I will seek him whom my soul loves...
Set me as a seal upon your heart,
as a seal upon your arm;
for love is strong as death,
passion fierce as the grave...
Many waters cannot quench love,
neither can floods drown it.
(*Song of Solomon* 3:1,2; 8:6,7)

Although Christian writers such as Bernard of Clairveaux have gone to great lengths to explain away the erotic element of such passages, they remain arguably sensual. Still, sexuality is in the context of fellowship, occurring within an exclusive relationship. This relationship exhibits an intense passion, marked by a physical aching for each other, pain during absence, constant needs to connect with words and body, and permanence.

Love as expressed in the Song of Solomon is physical but also sacred. It is sexuality found in an intense covenant relationship that gives protection to the erotic dimension. The Song of Songs goes further than the Yahwist, expressing the elements of sexual love and celebrating the unbreakable fidelity of the lovers (Goergen 21, 22).

3. Teachings from the Gospels

The teachings of Jesus in the Gospels do not include much explicit discussion about sexuality. The Gospel's does not focus mainly on the sexual life, but rather on spiritual life. In his discussion about divorce, however, Jesus affirms the indissolubility of marriage, reasserting the primacy of human relatedness (Matthew 19:3-9). Immediately following the discussion of marriage and divorce, Jesus refers to the *charism* of celibacy, the call of God to renounce genital sexuality for the sake of the Kingdom (Matthew 19:10). There is good reason to conclude that in part he is here referring to the local Essene community that is home to certain celibate males (Brown 49). Decidedly an anomaly among the Jews who had no motivation from the Torah for abandoning the joys of marriage

and the procreation of children (Lea 5) and indeed considered family obligations to be a duty (Sloyan 17), the Essenes withdrew from active family life in order to make room for strong spiritual growth. They cultivated the soil in a simple fashion, wore only fabrics made from the natural earthy fibers, abstained from marriage and often took a Nazarite vow which included celibacy. Perceived to have access to prophecies and divinations, they commanded the respect of the common people. John the Baptist was, no doubt, an Essene (Lea 7,8). (Jesus never condemned the Essenes and their ascetic tendencies, although he did condemn the Pharisees and Saducees.) It is possible, also, that Jesus, in referring to 'voluntary eunuchs' meant to address those who abandon sexual activity after finding a spouse unfaithful (Goergen 25). This would line up with the previous conversation on marriage and divorce.

Rather than being explicit about sexuality, Jesus spends time calling men and women to abandon the "gross temptations of earth [for] higher things fit for eternity" (Lea 8). Rejecting an ascetic perspective that would demand stern restrictions and promote bodily suffering, Jesus promotes a moderate and grateful enjoyment of all created gifts.

Whatever the status of life, relationships are sacred. His views of marriage are higher than most of his contemporaries. In a perplexing twist, Jesus affirms both marriage and celibacy, leading one to understand that the important issue is whether one's life is being lived in expectancy of and participation in the kingdom of God.

4. Life of Jesus

Jesus' sexuality is an interesting study. That he was a fully human male demands that he lived as a sexual being. Although his concern was for the dawning of the kingdom of God, he functioned in the milieu of human relations as a sexual being (Goergen 53). Using Goergen's delineation between affective and genital sexuality, Jesus' life is a good case for an intense expression of humanity which is sexual, spiritual and without genital expression.

Jesus profoundly demonstrates affective human love: his warm spirit toward the wounded person; his deep friendships, male and female; his teaching on compassion; his tender dealings with broken women, treating them as a sister; his welcome reception of children; his rebukes toward those who sought to dominate others; and his tears over those who would resist his open arms. When the Apostle John lays his head on Jesus' breast in John 13:25, the image is caught of affective love between two men. In allowing a woman to anoint his head with expensive perfume (Mark 14:3), Jesus receives an intimate expression of affective love from a woman. Expressing his sexuality in a 'catholic' and affective way, he lovingly draws other persons into his circle of life. Rather than negating his sexuality by refusing to become exclusively engaged in genital sexuality, Jesus functions as a whole, loving, relationally rich person whose priority of kingdom life colors every decision, even those of a sexual nature.

5. Paul

It would be difficult to overestimate the impact of the writings of the Apostle Paul on Christian life issues. Equally, it would be impossible to engage in a deep discussion of each of his essential writings and not consume the entire length of this paper and more. Paul's writings on singleness, celibacy and the sacrament of marriage are most pertinent here.

The special honor Paul gives to single Christians (1 Cor. 7:38) assesses "the value of marriage and celibacy with regard to prevailing circumstances . . . Not lower and higher morality but forestalling important decisions in life on the basis of expediency" (Demig 223). The imminent return of Christ looms large in his thinking. Seeing an "impending crisis" (I Cor. 7:26) about to descend with the end of the age, Paul desires that each person use what is in their present life to the advantage of the kingdom cause. Those who are single are most free for this purpose. Paul recognizes, like Jesus did, a *charism* or gift of singleness. While not for everyone, it is a legitimate option for Christians.

Marriage belongs to the age which is about to pass away (I Cor 7:25-28). Paul's eschatological practicality is a long way from what was to develop as a dualistic understanding of the world, pitting body against soul and sexuality against spirituality. Paul wished others would choose the celibate life because "of his understanding of the vastness of the mission and the shortness of the time available" (Hawthorne 598).

One crucial concept found in Paul is the analogy of the sexual union as a picture of the relationship between Christ and his Church. Inherent in this idea is the experience of intimate closeness and committed, covenantal love. The genital sexual union is thus sacramental -- a sign of Christ's ongoing, committed, passionate love (Goergen 29). "[T]he marital union of husband and wife is a transparency which has behind it a spiritual reality which shines through it and fills it with meaning." (Thielicke 125) Permanent love is the mirror of Christ's love, and Paul's context for understanding sexuality. It is a decidedly high view of love as expressed further 1 Cor. 13:4-9. Although Paul is certainly cautious about sexuality, his use of the sacramental analogy places the issue of sexuality in an honorable light.

In Chapter seven of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians (7:1-6), he wrestles through issues of marriage and virginity. Speaking pastorally to the church in Corinth and addressing their concerns for the environment of sexual promiscuity that surrounds them, Paul advocates that each person have a spouse and express sexuality within one's marriage. The marriage is to be monogamous and lasting, as a sacramental union. Paul states that sex is a danger, but he does not say it is equal to sin. Rather, sexuality must occur within the framework of covenant love (Goergen 27). This is fully in line with Yahwist and Song of Solomon views of sexuality.

Candid about his own preference for celibacy, Paul still does not make an edict for others. Again, his choice is pragmatic, based on the expected return of

Christ and the magnitude of the task before him. Since this world is passing away (Paul expected), present day joys and sorrows are not primary (1 Cor. 7:29-31). He would prefer that people stay in the state they are in, and not expend energy on re-defining their life situation (1 Cor. 7:8,9). The work needing to be done for the kingdom requires undivided attention to Christ. While endorsing his preference for the celibate life, he acknowledges that it is not for everyone.

Paul does not express opposition to marriage as an institution, nor does he discuss the issue of marriage or celibacy on the grounds of morality. Sexual abstinence is not intrinsically valuable. The human union is a good gift, and a sacramental sign of Christ's love for his Church. Paul chooses celibate life based on practical and eschatological concerns. But even in what he views as a perilous time, Paul does not forbid marriage. Paul's attitude toward sexuality is cautious, but positive.

6. Summary

Neither the Old Testament, the teachings of Jesus nor the Apostle Paul leads one to believe that human sexuality is, essentially, sin. Celibacy is a purposeful gift given to some, and completely compatible with the married lifestyle given to others.

From the Scriptures one can derive the following affirmations. Human sexuality, God's gift, is good. Unique to purely animal sexuality, human sexuality is meant to foster interpersonal love. Procreation is not the only Christian motivation for sexuality; it is also "celebrative, expressive, eschatological and

unitive" (Goergen 40). Pleasure, while not a Christian value in itself, is not opposed to Christian values.

In the New Testament setting, sexuality is a shaped by the kingdom values of sacrament and fidelity. Love that lasts is love in its highest form. Within the context of lasting love, the two sexes seek healthy, intimate, union with each other. Celibacy, then, must not preclude loving relationships. The New Testament scriptures do not obligate anyone to the choice of either marriage or singleness.

ECCLESIASTICAL DIALOGUE

From the time of Paul, there occurred a remarkable transformation from the simple celibate life of an Essene or missionary to a sacerdotal celibacy of a complex kind. Upon examination, it is impossible to view the teachings of Jesus and Paul as the beginning of a trajectory that leads what is to become the Christian theology of celibacy. There is a "significant gulf that separates [them] from later patristic authors" (Demig 224). Until the 16th century the "[f]athers' of the church had no scruple in admitting that in primitive times the cannon had no existence and the custom of [celibacy] was not observed" (Lea 10). Even Jerome, a strong voice in the sacerdotal celibate movement, admits that at the "beginning" there was no absolute injunction of any kind, but he quickly covers his tracks by saying "the church was 'infant' and could not receive solid food" (Lea 10). To understand the progression of celibate theology, one must listen to these voices.

On first read it appears that the fathers share the same language with Paul, using terms such as 'the flesh', 'sin', 'holiness', etc., but the theological implications are

freighted with vastly different meaning (Demig 224). An example of this is the word, 'flesh'. Literally meaning, "the soft part of the bodies of men and animals" it refers to "our ordinary human constitution as opposed to our mental and moral qualities." Used by Paul, this phrase means "human nature deprived of the Spirit of God and dominated by sin" (Tenney 284). The patristic writers clearly come to view 'the flesh' as the sexual elements of a human person.

Voices, even theological voices, speak from a cultural context. The Greco-Roman empire, even at its height, was "a society that was more helplessly exposed to death than is even the most afflicted and underdeveloped country in the modern world (Brown 6). The average person's life lasted a short twenty five years, with childbearing and childhood exacting awful tolls. It was a civic obligation for women to begin producing children at a very young age. "For the population of the Roman Empire to remain even stationary, it appears that women would have had to have produced an average of five children." (Brown 6) Girls acquired this role early. "In North Africa, nearly 95 percent of the women recorded on gravestones had been married, over half of those before the age of twenty-three." (Brown 6)

The Christian teaching that the "universe had shattered at the resurrection . . . and the renunciation of sexual activity is . . . participation in Christ's victory" was understandably tantamount to insanity (Brown 32). The pagan mind understood clearly that for the world to continue, clearly every generation must engage in the human task of intercourse, generation and the raising of children. For the Roman, the *real* resurrection was:

> That which takes place through the nature of the human body itself, and which through human means, is accomplished every day . . . the succession of children born from us, by which the image of those who begot them is renewed in their offspring, so that it seems as if those who have passed away a long time ago still more again among the living, as if risen from the dead. *Vita Theclae* 5, p.188 (Brown 7)

The Roman system of 'gendered virtues' endowed males with honor and freedom, and females with a home bound sense of shame (Torjesen 207). For a man to be virtuous he would be a public figure, full of courage, justice, self-mastery and autonomy. Sexual freedom of the broadest kind was his. A virtuous woman, on the other hand, must protect herself from the public eye, seeking to be chaste, silent and obedient (Torjesen 207). The perceived vulnerability of female sexuality demanded female subordination and male protection. Women's nature, from this perspective, is ontologically inferior (Torjesen 45).

The family is a cornerstone in the Roman culture, headed by a dominant male, or *paterfamilias* (authority and protector of the family). This male, under Roman law, assumes absolute authority of *potestas*, (power over children, grandchildren and slaves), *manus*, (power over wife and son's wives), and *dominium*, (power over possessions) (Maier 16). By the second century, as the Christian debate over celibate lifestyles is accelerating, the hierarchy of the Roman system that places women, slaves and barbarians in a vastly inferior position to men has entrenched its position. Men look down from an untouchable place of authority, bearing superiority to any other humans. Women are simply "failed males", fetuses who have not reached optimum potential (Brown 9, 10).

The Christian treatises which promote celibacy (and virginity) and decry the perils of marriage are sensitive to the huge pain reproductive requirements place on women's

bodies and psyches. Disease and death were the ever present companions of the process of birthing and raising children. If unable to bear children, the emotional torment and shame of infertility were severe. The presence of servants in the house, who would happily encroach on the sexual and emotional affections of the head of the household, introduced great insecurity for wives. It was not an easy life for wives barely out of childhood themselves. To be unmarried *was*, in fact, to escape suffering, overbearing authority, intense restrictions and even early death.

Besides the evident influence of the culture around them, the patristic writers personal experience influences their theology. Forays into the thinking of ancient philosophers (e.g., Plato, Aristotle), gnosticism and spin-off groups such as the Manichaeans, to name just a few, have made their mark. Christian truth and human cerebration are zealously mixed. The result is that through "both the speculative doctrines and practical observances of so many enthusiasts, heretical and orthodox . . . the [relations] between the sexes [become] the crucial test and most trustworthy exponent of religious ardor . . ." (Lea 23). Human sexuality has here become the watershed issue of practical spirituality.

1. Ante-Nicene Voices

Jesus, by the mid second century, had not returned to snatch the bodies of Christians to their glorification with him. This 'present age', though under strain, was enduring. Although Christians had, from the beginning, held to strict codes of purity, they had not marked their outward life by careful distinctions (holy days, physical marks on their bodies, visible boundaries to the Christian Church, etc.)

(Brown 62). "Christians found that they were forced to create for themselves the equivalent of the Jewish Law, if they were to survive as a recognizable group, separate from pagans and Jews." (Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho*, II.2 quoted in Brown, 60) The Christian teachers began to focus on two main issues: sexual restraint and sexual heroism (Brown 60). Under these two banners, ". . . Christians of the age of Justin had found their way to presenting themselves as the bearers of a truly universal religion" (Brown 60). Even those of the lowest social ranks could, by this means, achieve "reputations as stunning as those achieved by any cultivated male. Total chastity was a gesture that cut through the silken web of decorum that swathed the public man" (Brown 60). In this 'stunning symbolic gesture' is a sign that the present age, though yet visible, is nullified and Christ's reign begun.

Even the rite of Baptism became a symbol of 'de-sexualization'. The initiates stepped into the waters naked, having put off their 'sexual garments' (Hippolytus, *Apostolic Traditions*, 2I.5 and II, quoted in Brown, 96). In a strange twist, sexuality, heralded by the pagan world as the means of 'resurrection' life, now becomes the specter of death. Renunciation was a sign of death undone, the emancipation of humanity from the tyranny of the flesh. Although Origen argued that celibacy springs from the desire to serve God fully, (Lea 15), in reality, rigorous asceticism became for many, the pathway 'out' of the complex binds of culture, and into personal authority, spiritual power and too often, ambition.

While promoting celibacy and virginity, the father's of the first centuries did not encourage the weakening of basic family structures. The household was still the core of the church, and the fountain of its leadership. Celibacy is simply a means to facilitate the missionary vision, providing unique freedom for the kingdom (Brown 90). Already, though, by the end of the second century the connection between sexuality and the 'sin principle' was emerging, even within the context of marriage. Bishop Methodius of Olympus declared that "if husband and wife rationed their embraces," then their marriage union "need not be damning" (Douglas 147).

Clement of Alexandria (150 -- 200c.), who identified himself fully with the stoic ideal of freedom from passions, still voices support for marriage, albeit of a disciplined and severe fashion. Insisting that "husband and wife could serve Christ together 'without distraction'" he does not understand the sexual union to be an impediment to achieving Christian perfection (Brown 135). Quite as opposed to 'uncontrolled guffaws' as to the 'untidy tumblings' of pleasure seeking sexual activity, Clement envisions the Christian growing in discipline until achieving a lifestyle of simplicity, peace and wisdom -- the "serene sage" (Brown 135).

Already in Clement is the idea that sexuality is a blatant manifestation of the imposition of death on Adam and Eve (Brown 86). Like his contemporaries, he locates the center of human sexuality in the female person. The combination of ideas that sex is evil and women are sexual is a potent mix. "They say that the Savior himself said: 'I came to undo the works of women,' meaning by this

'female', sexual desire, and by 'work', birth and the corruption of death."

(Clement, *Strom.* 3.6.63, quoted in Brown 85)

Tertullian (AD 160 - 220), an austere ascetic with broad reaching influence, who also desires to protect the basic structure of marriage and family, is also very hard on women (Brown 78). An example is his treatise dealing with the adornment of women:

> [If you would recognize] your own state, that is, the condition of *being a woman*, . . . you would have dressed in mourning garments and even neglected your exterior, acting the part of mourning and repentant Eve in order to expiate . . that which woman derives from Eve -- *the ignominy . . . of original sin* and the *odium of being the cause of the fall of the human race*. . . Do you not believe that you are [each] an Eve? (Italics added.) (Tertullian, *The Apparel of Women,* Book 1, Chapter 1, Paragraph 1)

Later in the same document, Tertullian declares that the woman is, inherently stronger in evil than the devil:

> The sentence of God *on this sex of yours* [meaning female] lives on even in our times and so it is necessary that the guilt should live on, also. You are the one who opened the door to the Devil, . . . you are the one who persuaded *him whom the Devil* was not strong enough to attack. All too easily you destroyed *the image of God, man.* Because of your desert, that is, death, even the Son of God had to die. And you still think of putting ornaments over the skins of animals that cover you? (Italics added.) (Tertullian, *The Apparel of Women,* Book 1, Chapter 1, Paragraph 2)

Assuring women that their physical body is the cause of male sin, and that should any man lust because of them, they are also fully guilty, he advises that Christian women shun all intentional beauty, and "remove traces of natural grace by concealment and negligence" (Tertullian, *The Apparel of Women,* Book 2, Chapter 2, Paragraph 1). One has to smile over the juxtaposition of his advice

with that of his contemporary, Hermas, whose advice to men tempted to lust over other men's wives is to "try to think, on such occasions, of the charms of their own wives" (Hermas, *Shepherd,* quoted in Brown, 70). It would seem that Tertullian's ideal Christian woman would have very little charm on which to fix one's contemplation.

Tertullian believes in restricted sexual freedom within marriage, but is unwilling to allow the structures of society (particularly familial structures) to be shaken by the rigors of holiness. According to his teaching, the essential sexual nature of humans is most predominant in the body of women, who thus cause male sexual sin. This argument becomes useful later in the sacerdotal celibacy debate. A wife's propensity for adultery is a trap readily set for the man of Holy Orders who might, inadvertently, have relations with this, now unfit (having been unfaithful), woman. The weakness of women in this case puts the 'faithful' at risk, since they "could never be sure that his ministrations were not tainted with irregularity" (Lea 20). Any man, then, connected to a woman (even in Christian marriage), is in peril.

By c.150, the church was dealing with the issue of *digamus*. In this case, the husband of a second wife cannot receive Holy Orders. (This was reaffirmed at Trullo, 691.) Here in the second century, boundaries are being constructed around the private lives of clergy. By the close of the third century, by authority of Apostolic Constitutions and Canons, a bishop or priest is allowed to keep his wife, but cannot take a wife while *in* Holy Orders. In lower levels of church office,

marriage escapes condemnation, but only if the wife is *undefiled* by widowhood, divorce or concubinage (Lea 20). The Council of Elvira (303c.) determined that in extremity, a lay person might administer baptism but he must not be *digamus* (Lea 18).

While the clergy were resisting the validity of sacerdotal celibacy, the ideal of virginity was catching on like wildfire among the laity (Lea 20). Mothers who themselves had been "cheated" of the privilege of virginity, and had had to endure the "deprivations" of marriage, cultivated the commitment of virginity in daughters from the earliest ages. Since marriage often took place before a girl had entered puberty, (leading to the belief that intercourse triggered the onset of menstruation), it is unlikely that a virgin could choose to perpetuate the holy condition on her own. Only the intervention of a devout mother could prevent the inevitable obligation of early participation in the ongoing need for children to populate the cities. Female virgins, cloistered at home, were under the authority of their *paterfamilias* or they gathered into small communities (men did not tend to draw into communities at this juncture). As virgins merited increasing honor for their high position with God, it became a sort of status symbol to have a virgin in the household (Brown 262).

Origen adds another twist. Convinced that the image of God (the intellect) remains strong in the human person even after the 'fall', Origen views the body as a fitting, albeit 'cramped' frame through which the soul finds healing (Meredith 117). The body is not the 'prison of the soul', but a form perfectly adjusted to the

soul, and a participant in each individual's particular story (Brown 166). Since the body is simply a passing phase in the development of the soul, its inherent sexuality is a mere transitory concern of little consequence. Sexual differentiation, male and female, is not core to human existence. Around AD 206, Origen underwent a 'discrete castration', evidently practicing what he preached (Brown 166).

Origen's teaching comes to radical conclusions. Virginity, the necessary state before marriage, and continence, the post-marital commitment of the middle aged leader cease to be the ideals for the Christian life. Virginity now stands "for the original state in which every body and soul had [been] joined," a mark of the "pristine soul" (Brown 170). Renunciation of sexual life now stands out as "a fragile oasis of human freedom," and an outright rejection of the rights of society over the individual (Brown 170). For the first time in Christianity, social bonds (such as marriage and family)are not defended. Gender roles, so deeply rooted in culture as to define one's essential person, become self-limiting bondage that the soul can and should overthrow, even at the cost of cultural and family continuity (Brown 171).

Rather than receiving marriage as a gift prepared by the providence of God (the view of earlier prominent teachers such as Clement and Tertullian), Origen views its sensual delights with suspicion. Indulgence in bodily pleasure (intercourse, specifically), "actually coarsen[s] the spirit" (Brown 173). He finds complete satisfaction in the virginal body as a symbol of the spiritual world.

> Do not think that just as *the belly* is made *for food and food for the belly,* that the same way the body is made for intercourse. . . . [I]t was made that it should be a *temple to the Lord;* that the soul, being holy and blessed, should act in it as if it were a priest serving before the Holy Spirit that dwells in you. In this manner, Adam had a body in Paradise; but in Paradise he did not "know" Eve. (Origen, *Fragments on 1Corinthians,* 29, p. 370)

Virginity is the link between heaven and earth. Through such a 'holy body' (Mary) God has come to humanity, and now it was through the same that God works his deepest purposes. The body, a humble 'ass', is capable of being offered up to God, to "become the 'resplendent' vehicle of the soul" it was intended to be (Brown 177). The teaching of Origen opens the door to increasing defiance of family systems, (particularly the authority of *paterfamilias*), and provides women and men with a clear spiritual mandate empowering them to flee social and family structures. What is not clear to all was that they would "leave a precise social structure for an equally precise and . . equally social alternative" (Brown 217).

As the battle for Christian spirituality centered more and more on sexuality, virginity became second only to martyrdom as the act of complete ardor for the Lord. "Seventy-three percent of those who chose to suffer some form of personal or familial deprivation were women." (Ide 7) As the misery brought on by this issue intensified, sexuality became so colored with shame that women offered themselves to their husbands in an attitude of sorrow as if bearing a special cross of suffering, often seeking penance after intercourse, even in a marriage context (Ide 42). Young women and men used crude methods of disfiguring or de-sexing themselves to preclude the possible violation of their virginity (Ide 31). Civic

rulers turned the Christian obsession with sex into a weapon, giving virgins over to brothels or to gladiators for sexual sport (Ide 41). Many women in this predicament committed suicide, an act lauded by their parents and even encouraged as an act of sainthood (Ide 41). "Christian mothers encouraged their sons and daughters to 'stand fast' and die for the message of Jesus of Nazareth, regardless of the pain, the means of death, or the penalties that would be extracted." (Ide 36) By the time Athanasius wrote the popular novella, *The Life of Saint Anthony,* who perfected the ascetic life in the environs of the desert, the setting was ripe to romanticize the ascetic 'paradise' of the desert, far from siren calls of civic and family centers.

2. Making Celibacy Official

The Council of Nicea (AD 325) is noted for its great debates over the doctrines of God, specifically the challenge to the deity of Christ. From this council emerged a strong Christian theology of the Trinitarian nature of God. A secondary issue on the agenda was the matter of sacerdotal celibacy. Indeed, this Council marks the movement of the church at large toward the adoption of an official position. Constantine had no small influence. He "believed that the temporalities of the Church could only be entrusted to men cut off from family ties . . . [and] clearly regarded the supposed accession to the landed estates of the Church as a satisfactory explanation of the prohibition of marriage to its ministers" (Lea 11). Simply put, because of the vast, almost *daily* accessions of property brought to the church from the estates of pious members and death bed

confessions, it was deemed necessary that the priesthood be cut off from paternity and subsequent nepotism (Lea 43).

Since the Council of Elvira, Spain (AD 303) had taken action in a bold declaration, legislating that "all concerned in the ministry of the altar should maintain entire abstinence from their wives under pain of forfeiting their positions" and had also put an end to female companions of priests (the increasingly popular choice made by two celibates who would join together in an unofficial 'spiritual marriage'), sacerdotal celibacy became a matter for consideration by a larger constitutional body (Lea 30). (Elvira's declaration covered only the churches involved in its local synod.)

Fully believing the mind of the great Council was directed by the Holy Spirit, the issue was debated. Although historically overshadowed by the Arian debate, the ascetic battle was equally intense. In the end, the ascetic movement won the day, and six canons established (Davis 56):

1. Those who had castrated themselves were forbidden to continue in their Orders, or eliminated as possible future candidates. If the castration was accomplished by violence or for health reasons, they were exempt from this canon and eligible for ministry. (This essentially barred 'eunuchs' who were considered to be rampantly immoral, from the clergy class.)
2. Prohibition was declared of any hasty promotion of a recently baptized believer to the rank of priest or bishop. Those already in this position would be deposed.

3. Clergy were forbidden to have any woman dwelling with him except for mother, sister, aunt or someone above suspicion. This applied mainly to celibate clergy who had entered into a "spiritual marriage" (the practice of joining in a 'holy' but unofficial continent marriage with a celibate of the opposite sex, for the purposes of housekeeping and companionship). Those already committed to an *official* marriage were allowed to keep their wife with them.
4. The ordination of notorious sinners was forbidden, even if they had drastically reformed their life, "for the church vindicates only those of irreproachable life."
5. Anyone who at any time had denied their faith was deposed from clerical ranks.
6. Clergy were forbidden to engage in usury, even if they restricted their interest charge to the civic limit of twelve percent.

The bishops solemnizing these canons considered enjoining celibacy on the lower echelons of leadership (such as deacons), but "were dissuaded by Paphnutius, famous celibate bishop and confessor from Upper Egypt" (Davis 56). The canons, written to establish the dignity of the clergy, moved the issue of continence from the realm of moral influence to that of official edict (Silber 6). Distance between clergy and laity was fast becoming a yawning cavern.

In 352 the Council of Laodicea added to the edicts of Nicea and forbade women in the priesthood. (To recent times the Vatican has held to the belief that

"only [the] male body can represent Christ . . . because Christ represents God through the maleness of his body" (Torjesen 223).)

Soon thereafter, Eustathius, Bishop of Sebastia in Cappadocia, began a vigorous campaign against the already beleaguered married priesthood. Declaring that married people are incapable of salvation, unable to pray in their homes and worthy of only contempt he worked to have the blessings and sacraments of married priests rejected. In A.D.362 a gathering of bishops formally rejected his ideas, although they lingered on in the corridors of ascetic spirituality (Lea 42). Twenty years later, in A.D.382, the first "absolute command of clergy in higher orders to celibacy inviolate" was enacted (Lea 42). The ascetics had triumphed. (By the sixth century wives largely disappeared from the clergy (Brown 432).) The only thing missing from the fourth century sacerdotal celibate movement, was a structured theology.

3. Post Nicene Voices

By the mid fourth century, sexuality had three meanings: a legitimized activity within marriage if aimed at reproduction; a violation of humanity that pollutes and scars the soul; a binding, care laden responsibility. Only occasionally was sexuality perceived to be a source of marital intimacy (Salesbury 1). Increasingly the church was coming to believe that sexual renunciation was the pathway to spiritual power and authority. It was necessary to find a universally accepted theological basis for this increasingly prevalent belief.

John Chrysostom (AD 347-407) was not the only patristic writer to creatively interpret the creation passages, but his reconstruction is a worthy prototype.

> Adam and Eve remained apart from marriage, leading the sort of life in Paradise they would have led had they been in Heaven, luxuriating in their association with God. Desire for sexual relations, conception, labor pains, childbirth, and every *form of corruption* was removed from their soul. As a clear stream flows forth from a pure source, so in that place were they adorned with virginity. (Chrysostom, quoted in Torjesen 210)

From this vantage point, sexuality and sexual desire is not 'naturally' implanted in the human person as part of their biology. Passion, marriage and procreation result directly from the evils of the fall of mankind in the primordial garden (Chrysostom xv). Chrysostom uses his skill with words to put it succinctly: "For where death is, there is marriage." (Chrysostom xv) Arguing that *sin* and *not* the lack of sexual intercourse is the potential source of the demise of the human race, he makes the point that from the beginning God could have easily created more humans to populate the earth without the evils of sexuality. (Later Chrysostom declares that a slave is in a better estate than a married person, since the slave can always hope to someday buy his freedom (Chysostom xxiii).) That marriage has been useful in its time, in the 'childhood' of the race, is his concession (Chrysostom xvi).

Chrysostom focuses on the life of angels (who are without sexuality) as the heavenly life. To remain virgin is to participate in that angelic heavenly life. If one would live on earth as in heaven, the rewards in the next life would be vast. Jesus

has a special position reserved for the virgin woman: that of becoming his most intimate bride. To be the 'bride of Christ' frees a woman from the domination of authority here on earth. It is an appealing offer, effectively emancipating women from a rigidly paternal system on earth and promising a God-lover in heaven.

The growing influence of Chrysostom's teaching caused some practical problems. At one point, he comments that the church in Antioch was assisting over 3000 virgins (Chrysostom, *On Virginity*). Although virgins often remained with their families, many came to the church for supervision.

> I cannot enumerate all the anxieties caused by virgins. The fact is that when they are enrolled, they cause extraordinary trouble to the man who is entrusted with [their] administration. . . . [A] great number of these women [are] full of innumerable vices, [and] have intruded into the ranks of these holy ones. (Chrysostom, *On the Priesthood*, 3:17)

It was becoming too convenient for insincere persons to claim the position of 'virgin' in the church, escaping a harried life on earth and earning a privileged one in heaven without truly 'bearing their cross.' The importance of delineating the requirements of virginity and controlling enrollment became evident. The solution was the public vow, or 'veiling'. In a public ceremony "before God and angels and men, the venerable gathering of clergy the holy band of virgins, the assembly of the Lord, and the Church of the Saints" (Basil of Caesarea, *To The Lapsed Virgins*, Epistle 46, 5) gathered (usually at Easter) to veil those who would now live their lives completely untouched by material concerns and under the unqualified authority of the church (Chrysostom xxvii). A second benefit of 'veiling' virgins gained by the (clearly male) church leadership was the

containment of the growing influence and spiritual power being given to virgins. Cloistered and submitted to a new male 'head' (essentially a second *paterfamilias)* the virgin re-entered a world of hierarchy remarkably like the one she had escaped. The important thing to note, though, is that as a publicly recognized 'Order', the state of virginity had ceased to be primarily spiritual and personal, and had now become institutionalized.

Ambrose (AD 339-397), a Christian theologian, was "deeply preoccupied with the role of the Catholic Church in Roman society" (Brown 346). Angered by the perceived cowardice of the clergy, he becomes convinced the church needed to assert herself an "inviolably holy body, possessed of unchallengeable, because divine, authority" (Brown 346). Ambrose discovered in the matter of sexuality an understanding of Christ as well as a needed boundary between the holy church and society.

Christ's conception, birth and life, as Ambrose understands it, are unscarred by the *impulse* or the *action* of sexuality (Brown 351). As such, Christ is the bridge between this present evil state of human life and a glorious future life with God. (This teaching would later fuel the theology penned by Augustine, namely, that the act of intercourse is the conduit through which original sin is passed.)

The perpetual virginity of Mary becomes Ambrose's spirited cause as his theology develops. To maintain Mary's 'power of influence' over virginal life, she must be permanently closed to *sexual stirring*. Ambrose teaches that by a great

miracle even the rigors of the birthing process did not separate her hymen, nor was the boundary of her womb ever opened (Brown 354). From this, the example of perpetual virginity is established for those of the 'Order of Virgins'. "What was at stake was the absolute nature of the boundaries that separated the Catholic Church from the world, as well as those which rendered individual virgins irrevocably "sacred" by reason of their vocation and separation . . ." (Brown 353) It was deemed essential for the sake of the church that the virgin remains inviolate for all of life. It was possible to break the vow of virginity, but the repercussions are dire:

> [After enumerating extensive trials of married life . . .] Then, when this miserable woman has finished all these things or rather when she herself has been utterly finished, she leaves this very painful life and there [in heaven] she will quickly have other pains and more moaning when she sees holy virgins clothed in the garments of immortality holding in their hands the Psalter that is engraved in their hearts, singing the triumphant hymn of virginity, and wearing on their temples the wreaths of immortality in return for which they renounced the human groaning here [below], dancing in front of Christ under the leadership of angels, with delight rising in merriment . . . When Christ the Bridegroom shows them affection - while she sighs deeply with groans - then she will blame herself again, then she will strongly regret her past actions and her repentance will be in vain. (Wimbusch 55,56,57)

Upon receiving such ominous teaching, the walls of the convent became high indeed. The status of the faithful virgin -- sign of angelic life and boundary of the church -- was thus greatly elevated.

In the 380's, the prominence of sacred women rose to such a lofty pitch that it raised the issue of the quality of male leadership in the ranks of clergy (Brown 359). Although it had long been popular opinion that the senior clergy be

continent, this was not rigorously followed. A surprisingly vocal voice from the laity began calling for a celibate clergy. The hierarchy of spiritual authority, based explicitly on the extent of an individual's withdrawal from sexual activity, clashed with ecclesiastical hierarchy.

A second issue added to the urgency of the celibacy debate. Commonly, provincial churches were wrestling with a chronic shortage of clergy recruits. Only the large metropolitan churches were without this problem. Monks and anchorites in the ascetic movement used this dilemma, (with much public support), to vie for positions among the clergy, heretofore denied. At the same time, a growing upper class of Christians was using its influence to plant leaders of high political stature into positions of ecclesiastical authority, often motivated by the power and wealth available to clergy. The problem was:

> [t]hey were not like the relatively humble, married clergy of an earlier age: they had fought wars; they had inflicted capital punishment; they had imposed judicial torture; their public duties in the cities caused them to stain their eyes with the lust and cruelty of public games. (Siricius, *Letter,* 10.5.13, quoted in Brown 358)

It became the opinion of some Bishops that a middle group between the disturbing ascetics and the aggressive ruling class might be established by requiring clerical celibacy. The altar was henceforth to be a place of holiness, bounded by the sexual continence of those under Holy Orders. For Ambrose, the matter of virginity (and secondarily, continence) makes "concrete the integrity of the Catholic church in a hostile society while it endow[s] the Church with a sense of

momentum over against the outside world" (Brown 363). The individual virgin or celibate priest is a type of the church as a whole.

As Jerome (AD 342-420) wrestled with the scriptures on this issue he wrote prolifically on the matter of '*the flesh*' a term used by Paul the Apostle. Jerome's concept of 'the flesh' is cast in strictly sexual terms, and overshadows previous meanings. Believing, as Chrysostom does, that virginity is truly the angelic life, Jerome's preaching ruthlessly denounces female sexuality, demanding that women embrace an ascetic life sufficient to remove from their bodies the marks of womanhood (menstruation, femininity, etc.) and become themselves, "men". Intercourse and Paradise are, to Jerome, as incompatible as Paradise and death (Brown 399). The struggle of St. Paul against the 'flesh' becomes the prototype of the struggle of the saint against sexuality. "If after nakedness, after fasting, after prison, beatings and torments, Paul still used to cry: *Oh wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death,* do you think that you . . . can remain secure?" (Jerome, *Letter,* 22.5) Jerome shocked the Christian world by stating plainly that first marriages are "regrettable, if pardonable capitulation's to the flesh, and that second marriages were only one step away from the brothel" (Brown 377). That priests are holy is only the case if their's is the purity of virgins.

Augustine (AD 354-430) finally formulated a systematic theology that *identified* sexuality with sin (Torjesen 211). The doctrines that had long been acceptable located marriage and sexual relations *after* the fall of Adam and Eve,

during which humanity lapsed from the angelic state of creation into death (or physicality). Sexual intercourse was not part of the person's original nature. Had Adam and Eve not fallen, they would not in any way resemble a contemporary married couple. Augustine, developed ideas different from these, describing Adam and Eve as physical beings from the beginning, "endowed with the same bodies and characteristics as ourselves" (Brown 400). Augustine remained convinced that their purpose was, at least in part, to procreate, which includes physical intercourse, childbirth and family life. Although he does not place the full burden of sexuality on women, it is clear he understands the creation passages to be an ontological basis for male hierarchy. But an important change in understanding is that men and women are physical, even from the beginning. The angelic state lay in the future (Brown 400).

Augustine's thinking initiated a huge transition of thought. The tragedy of the fall is not located *outside* humanity, in the establishment of marriage, family and society (Augustine's vision of the celestial city is remarkably like a Roman city, without the flaws), but is located *within* the human person. The *distortion of the will*, not the sexual drive, is the crux of the brokenness of humanity. Once a unified, loving, controlled being, the human person is now fractured and it is in the arena of sexuality that the condition is most visible. Before the fall sexual relations encompassed the full engagement of reason and will, completely avoiding unreasonable and uncontrollable passion (Brown 408).

When man pitted his will against the will of God, discontinuity was the result. Parts of the body no longer acquiesce to the will (specifically, as Augustine observed, the 'male member') (Brown 416). Sexual sensations that are beyond one's control (i.e., erection) are a mocking signal of the relentlessness of death. "The passionate and irrational aspects of sexuality -- which is what ma[kes] it sinful -- c[an] be redeemed in marriage through the good of procreation . . . [A]ny form of sexuality that d[oes] not aim at procreation [i]s therefore sinful." (Torjesen 219) Further in Augustine is the idea that because original sin is passed from generation to generation through male semen, an inescapable damnation falls upon every human infant born (with the exception of Christ, who was conceived without a seminal deposit).

In a sense, Augustine puts men and women on equal footing regarding the moral guilt of sin. The perverted will, not the sexual nature is the source of all brokenness in humankind. This theory had the potential of a fresh understanding of womanhood. (Previously, sexuality itself is the result of the 'fall', and since female bodies are more sexual in that they house the reproductive system, women received a disproportionate amount of responsibility for human sin.) Central to the expression of the twisted will, though, emerged the old idea of sexuality. And so, moving away from a potentially liberating theology of women, Augustine, who admitted that women have soulful access to the contemplation of God, sides with his predecessors in relegating woman's nature primarily to bodily and sexual

function. Together with man, she is able to image God, but the man is the possessor of the image of God without relation to woman (Ruether 218).

> In what sense are we to understand the Apostle, that the man is the image of God . . . but the woman is not. . . The solution lies . . . in that the woman together with her husband is the image of God, so that the whole substance is one image. But when she is assigned as a help-meet, a function that pertains to her alone, then she is not the image of God; but as far as the man is concerned, he is by himself alone the image of God, just as fully and completely as when he and the woman are joined together in one. (Augustine, *de Trinitate,* 12.7.10)

Womankind is once more ontologically inferior, subordinated to man and alienated in a unique way from God. Not surprising then, the necessity of renouncing one's femaleness and sexual identity in order to close the gap between one's self and God re-emerges (Torjesen 8). In praise of the ascetic woman Olympias, John Chrysostom her dear friend declares, "Don't say 'woman', but 'what a man!', because this is a man, despite her physical appearance" (Chrysostom, quoted in Torjesen 211). And when Palladius wrote his *Lausiac History* (Volz 1), he describes a holy woman with the phrase, "this female man of God" (Cloke, Introduction). Again the logical conclusion is the entrenchment of sexual renunciation for all serious followers of Christ, so that the process of spiritual transformation might be complete.

4. Resistance

In the closing decade of the fourth century, significant resistance came against the direction that theology of human sexuality was going. Three persons stand out as leaders: Bonosus, Jovinian and Vigilantius.

Bonosus openly argued against the perpetual virginity of Mary, bringing upon himself fiery scorn from the acerbic pen of Jerome. Jovinian, a virtuous and sober man, rejects the efficacy of celibacy. Pope Innocent became his foe in the matter, aided again by Jerome. The third leader, Vigilantius is more colorful than the other two, having been a reckless shepherd boy made slave and later chosen for the priesthood. Ironically, he spent part of his training living with Jerome. Later he denounces celibacy he has seen as a "fertile source of impurity," also calling into question the matters of extreme fasting, worship of relics, prayers for the dead, use of candles in worship, and oblations to ecclesiastical authority (Lea 48, 49). All three are emphatically attacked by Jerome, and by the time of the last of their deaths in AD 419, organized resistance in that period had ended (Lea 49).

5. Summary

The radical conclusions of the patristic writers and great Councils are not simply a development of the teaching of the Old and New Testaments. Christian understanding of sexuality has undergone extensive alterations. Sex is no longer a gift from the hand of the creator, but is, itself, evil, resulting from the fall. The core of post-fallen humanity is genital sexuality, a force foreign and inherently evil. The heritage of original sin is planted into every infant life through the act of copulation and conception. It is strange that the purposes of spirituality now center largely around activities meant to dislodge and banish the evils of human sexuality and gender, considering that "there are no Pauline or New Testament

grounds for holding that the destiny of redeemed humanity is to be androgynous, unisex, sexually undifferentiated" (Hawthorne 874).

Celibacy, now maneuvered away from being a purpose driven life for the sake of the kingdom of God, is personal and spiritual. To renounce one's sexuality is the most significant means of attaining heavenly life on earth and salvation (with reward) in the future. Those whose renunciations of sexuality include an intentional debasement of the body are available to greatest reward and honor. The female body, because of its reproductive capacity, is more sexual, and thus has closer ties to the earth than the male body, which *is* the image of God. The inferior nature of women demands strict physical denial in order to atone for female sin and attain spiritual sublimity.

As this theology became acceptable on an ever widening scale, celibate life, of necessity, became institutionalized. What was a personal choice for some became an obligation for many. As the situation intensified, ascetics, churchmen and even bishops sometimes took a celibate companion with whom they companionably shared a household. The taking of a spiritual companion, *syneisaktism,* became just one of many creative alternatives practiced by those forced into the celibate life (Derrick 3).

As centuries passed, the struggle to enforce celibacy intensified. Waves of passion swept through the church, each one pushing opinions to new extremes. Human sexuality was the focus of a debate that did not even attempt to claim a Scriptural foundation. Bizarre positions emerged. One abbot, Conrad of Marchtal, considered the jurisdictional responsibility of a neighboring convent of celibate nuns too great a danger for his male community:

> We, and our whole community of cannons, recognizing that the wickedness of women is greater than all other wickedness of the world and that there is no anger like that of women, and that the poison of asps and dragons is more curable and less dangerous to men than the familiarity of women, have unanimously decreed for the safety of our souls, no less than for that of our bodies and goods, that we will on no account receive any more sisters to the increase of our perdition, but will avoid them like poisonous animals. (Erens 314)

The theology that alienated persons from their sexuality inherently alienated them from each other and God.

In the two centuries prior to the Protestant Reformation several prominent leaders urged the Church to reconsider its position. William Durandus the Younger brought a paper to the Council of Vienne (1311) which proposed that since the legislations and penalties imposed by the church were not effective in improving clerical incontinence, perhaps voluntary celibacy would be in order (Lynch 58). At the end of the fourteenth century, an eminent canonist Panormitanus strongly endorsed priestly marriage. "He argued that continence is not part of the substance of the order for secular clerics, nor is it of divine law. ." (Lynch 58). An official document brought to the Council of Constance (1414 -- 1418) from Cardinal Zabarella states that "if concubinage c[an] not be effectively

dealt with then it would be better to permit clerics to marry" (Lynch 59). Clearly ongoing pressure harassed the Church.

Human sexuality did not at first have a place of significance among the issues of the reformation. However, sexuality and spirituality could hardly be dealt with apart from the other since they were so closely linked in Christian theology. No one since Augustine had formulated a theology of human sexuality and spirituality that was able to re-direct Church praxis. This Luther did. In a remarkably short time the "[m]ainstream reformation abolished celibacy and Christian monasticism which had been the mainstay of an independent female vocation in the early and medieval church. But it did not substitute a new inclusion of women in the Protestant married clergy" (Ruether 221).

Theology formed during and after the Reformation reinterpreted the creation passages, offered a fresh perspective on marriage and reinstated human sexuality as a good gift from God. Although having the potential to completely recharacterize the Christian understanding of the nature of woman previously slandered by 'ungodly celibacy' (Luther, *Lectures on Genesis,* 2:18), the reformation, in the main, tied women again to *Kinder, Kuche,* and *Kirche,* under male authority.

1. Genesis Revisited

Luther took a fresh look at the creation texts so long a part of the discussion of basic human nature. Coming to the conclusion that man and woman are both created (to some degree) in the image of God, the destination of both is "to inherit the glory of the future life" (Luther, *Lectures on Genesis,* 1:27). Beyond this, sex is a divinely ordained gift. Procreation, an impulse planted by

God into humans, expresses the divine will for human life (Luther, *Lectures on Genesis,* 1:28).

Luther often viewed women from a patently male perspective. "[W]ives are adorned with the blessing and glory of motherhood, namely that we are all conceived, born and nurtured by them." (Luther, *Lectures on Genesis,* 3:16) In wrestling through the apparent contradictions between Genesis 1:27 (male and female made in the image of God) and I Corinthians 11:7 (only male made in the image of God) Luther comes to the conclusion that while woman is in one sense the image of God, man is "superior in the degree of honor":

> Moses includes each of the two sexes, for the woman appears to be a somewhat different being from the man, having different members and a much weaker nature. Although Eve was a most extraordinary creature -- similar to Adam so far as the image of God is concerned, that is, in justice, wisdom, and happiness -- she was nevertheless a woman. For as the sun is more excellent that the moon (although the moon, too, is a very excellent body), so the woman, although she is a most beautiful work of God, nevertheless was not the equal of the male in glory and prestige. (Luther, *Lectures on Genesis,* 1:27)

2. Marital Union Honored

The implications of Luther's theology were very practical. In his sermon, "On the Estate of Marriage", Luther proposes radical changes to Christian thought. A spouse is a good gift. One might even make the pursuit of a spouse the matter of prayer. Marital and family love is the highest form of love, since it takes a covenantal and relational form. Monastic life, in contrast, is simply self-seeking, pursuing the good of oneself alone (Torjesen 236).

Further, Luther suggests that marriage become the new monasticism. Reinvesting family life (childbearing, diapers, raising children, the family meals) with dignity, he calls domestic acts, "works of penance, superior to Psalms." No longer simply a concession for those unable to control their lust, marriage becomes the pathway to the rewards of heaven (Torjesen 236). Joyfully embracing this new theology, priests took wives, nuns married and the clergy family became an established norm.

This re-awakening to the privilege of the human union of marriage, startling as it was, nevertheless casts its own shadow. Marriage, effectively enshrined, took the upper hand over celibacy. Still unable to comfortably co-exist together, marriage and celibacy are again at odds. The strengths of celibate life are lost to this belief system. The pendulum has swung too far, once more creating an unhealthy dichotomy.

Sexuality is redeemed, but sequestered in marriage. The 'act of marriage' -- coitus -- is made synonymous with human intimacy. Religious roles for women are reduced to one -- domestic helpmate to man, and the ultimate religious role is 'pastor's wife'. Women, 'almost' the image of God, again find themselves in a position of dependency upon the ones (males) who have more in common with God (Drury 39).

3. Female Sexuality

It is arguable that the Reformation was not liberating to women. Allowed to 'be' women (rather than denying their womanhood and endeavoring to be

male), and honored to a degree within their gender, "female sexuality [now] was securely anchored in the sheltered waters of the Reform doctrine of marriage" (Torjesen 238). In reality, women lost the freedom to pursue education, careers, and spiritual independence that was theirs within the celibate vocation. The primary option for a holy woman was now 'pastor's wife'.

Luther, once a celibate himself, drew from his monastic roots the belief "in the original equivalence of Eve and Adam in paradise" (Ruether 221). But this original equivalence only accentuated the depth of the fall that was Eve's as she plunged humankind into sin. The result was a loss of equality, and a new place of subordination and subjugation. This is the just punishment due her.

> This means that Eve's sorrows, which she would not have if she had not fallen into sin, are to be great, numerous and also of various kinds. . . Now there is also added to those sorrows of gestation and birth that Eve has been placed under the power of her husband, she who previously was very free and, as the sharer of all the gifts of God, was in no respect inferior to her husband . . The rule remains which the husband and the wife are compelled to obey by God's command. He rules the home and the state, wages war, defends his possessions, tills the soil, builds, plants, etc. The woman, on the other hand, is like a nail driven into the wall. She sits at home . . . The wife should stay at home and look after the affairs of the household as one who has been deprived of the ability of administering those affairs which are outside and concern the state . . . In this way Eve is punished. (Luther, *Lectures on Genesis,* 3:16)

The Calvinist theology, by contrast, continues the line of Augustinian reasoning and views subordination as part of the original order of creation. "Woman would have been subordinate even in paradise, although her situation must now be doubly reinforced as punishment for sin" (Ruether 222). Not an ontological or spiritual inferiority but a created social order, this hierarchy meant

to stem the flow of sin and chaos in society. The 'weakness of women's' nature which demanded a hierarchical order suggests inherent inferiority, although it is not explicitly taught.

Elaborated by the English Puritans of the late sixteenth century, the Calvinist theology developed into the idea of 'domestic economy', where the husband is the benevolent ruler in all things earthly and spiritual, and the wife a docile helpmate. The dark side of this relegation of characteristics was the constant suspicion placed upon women that they were secretly (or not so secretly) rebellious by nature (Ruether 223). Puritan divine, William Perkins, in 1596 wrote a paper entitled "The Damned Art of Witchcraft". Allowing that witchcraft is available to both genders, he states that most often women become involved because "they are naturally insubordinate and wish to reject their divinely appointed subordination to men" (quoted in Ruether 223).

Since the issue was finally opened, others offered alternate theologies. George Fox and his wife, Margaret Fell, leaders of the dissenting group called Quakers, held to quite different views of the equality of women. They taught that the inequality experienced between men and women was the result of the sin of both Adam and Eve, and was remedied by the redemptive work of Christ. In Christ, then, all are fully equal (Drury 39).

4. Summary

As the dust settled over the reform debates, and the (now) Protestant branch of the Church began to work through the permutations of a new theology,

celibacy was notable by its absence. The old Augustinian view of human sexuality had been dealt a severe blow, and the Church was reeling.

Celibacy, not sexuality, was named 'sin' (by Luther). Sexuality, restored as a 'good' given by God at creation, was hidden in marriage. Marriage itself became the new 'ideal' life situation. Elevated to a position of spiritual superiority, marriage became the context in which women could serve God. Where celibacy had long stood as a separating barrier between lay and clergy, the idealized pastoral family now took its place. Extraordinary pressure came to bear on with wives and children of clergy as Church membership sought a pastor with an 'other-worldly' life.

In many ways, then, the redemption of human sexuality and marriage did not have a liberating effect on the lives of holy women. Still relegated to a position inferior to men either by ontology or divinely appointed social order, women were moved into new environments with old hierarchical structures. The new structures, though, did not provide new venues for education, ministry and career. As convents shut down and education fell to other institutions women were again marginalized. A theology that had the potential to truly redeem women's sexual nature fell far short, and instead recreated positions of subordination through which she might pay the penalty for her primacy in sin.

Reformational understanding of sexuality is primarily genital in that persons function properly from their sexual nature when they assume appropriate gender roles and engage in genital sexual activity within marriage bonds. As sexuality

came to be understood in this way, the rejection of it no longer carried a sense of spiritual elitism. Although there was now a legitimate venue for sexual expression, it still carried an element of shame. God stood a great distance apart from human sexuality, alienated from the drives and expressions of sex. Without an understanding of the affective aspects of sexuality, the full 'good' of human sexuality could not be realized.

PROTESTANTISM IN THE LATE 20TH CENTURY

It is foolishness to assume that anyone lives completely without the influence of current culture and past heritage. The Protestant evangelical church, sometimes prone to this very illusion, actually carries a heavy burden from these two sources.

1. Post Modern Culture of the Late 20th Century

The Church exists in a decidedly spiritual, though post-Christian culture:

> We yearn for something that will give a sense of meaning and purpose to our daily lives, something more engaging than paying lip service to the idea of God or attending worship on the weekend. We are haunted by a vacuum. Our hearts are shaped by something that hasn't happened to us -- yet. Multitudes of modern seekers are full of emptiness, aching to be soulful, longing for a spark of inspiration that will ignite a passion that will lift them beyond the pettiness of getting and spending, that will animate their minds, their bodies, their spirits. We are hungry to receive the sense of the sacred that is currently painfully missing from our love affairs, families, jobs, and politics. (Keen xvi)

Keen, flatly stating that 'spirituality is in,' gives these features of the new spiritual landscape: a rise in "spiritual individualism" and "uncorseted religious experimentation"; the new interest in native American Indian religion and practice; the growing interest in myth and ritual; an increase in assorted east Indian gurus

who are being received as teachers of meditation and spiritual discipline in the west; the importance of the "higher power" to aid in twelve step recovery programs; a fuzzifying of the boundaries between spirituality and psychotherapy; the new interest in spirituality for physical healing; and the new romance between religion and science (Keen xix, xx, xxi).

Christians too are expressing longings for spirituality that 'works' in their life. No longer satisfied with cognitive faith, the cry is for more. Power and victory movements (currently popular among Protestants), who offer the presence of God in a personally empowering way, answer this longing. Few persons are willing to build a lifestyle on fact alone. "More and more people have realized that what they need is much more than interesting sermons and interesting prayers. They wonder how they might really experience God." (Noewen 75)

This affects choices which emerge around the issue of human sexuality. During the interviews of twenty-five young single adults who consider themselves committed Christians, three women commented on "abstinence covenants" they signed as teenagers. The consensus was that in the heat sexual desire, the 'promise' made did not figure highly into the decision before them.

Contributing to this is the objection inherent in post-modernism of a cohesive view of reality. "Postmodernism rejects 'metanarratives' -- overarching or universal theories and explanations -- all efforts to totalize -- that is, to bind everything together in some kind of coherent whole" (Snyder 216). Each individual's personal narrative defines, for them, reality. While many young

Christian adults still concede, mentally, to the Biblical standard, (all twenty-five interviewees could state a reasonable version of the 'Christian standard') it became clear that many were willing to make themselves an exception, with only moderate guilt. To believe one thing (valid for others) and live another (valid for self) is an option for the one creating an "improvisational self" (Belah 81). Influenced by the cultural milieu, young Christians, while affirming Christian truth, consider their needs sufficient to "[construct] a self that is a composite of roles that are chosen without reference to eternal realities" (Veith 84,85).

The greatest felt need, broadly speaking, is the need for others. This young generation has an intense sense of abandonment. Feeling alone and unconnected, even to their families in many instances, they will make many adjustments in belief to alleviate the pain of loneliness. Of the adults interviewed, almost half who believed that a celibate life was the call for the single believer, said that they would engage in sexual activity to feel loved and worthy, to alleviate loneliness or to keep from losing a relationship. Second to these pressures was the issue of lust and temptation.

The number one need of the 'buster' generation is intimacy. Hence, when a church home is being sought, the deciding factor has changed from, 'Is truth taught here?' to, 'Can I find relationships here?' Authority figures and institutions have broken too many promises and eroded any confidence in absolute truth.

> [Those] born in the Nixon era have never know national trust in leadership. In fact, we have seen corrupt leadership in everything from the PTL

> ministries to the Los Angeles police department. (Mahedy and Bernardi 18)

People -- friends, intimacy, relationships -- are what fills the longing for significance. The depth of longing for true human/spiritual relationships paves the way for people to become their own 'moral entrepreneurs', determining personal morality apart from any 'official' standard. A new kind of despair washes over lives after such choices, since it leaves one with a sense of 'groundlessness'. But for the moment, desperate loneliness dissolves.

Another evident attitude in culture is the trivialization of sexuality. The vast quantity of sexual stimulation portrayed on every corner, in advertising and television has completely robbed sexuality of its sacredness. One's sexuality is the 'membership pass' to entertainment or intimacy, depending on the circumstance. On a recent television talk show a group of teens was discussing various views of sexuality. The (obviously) Christian girl spoke of her virginity as a 'treasure' only to be scorned by host and audience alike. Sexuality is functional, genital, and of use for personal fulfillment and fun. In this way society is effectively vulgarizing human sexuality, making it little more than animal passion. Sexuality is a physiological urge, and no one can reasonably require another person (even a minor) to withhold from genital activity. With no sense of 'affective sexuality' or sacredness of relationship, sexual activity, often motivated by a need to be loved and treasured, is often an entrance to greater isolation and marginalization than previously known.

2. The Influence of Tradition

The accounts of creation located in the book of Genesis have long been the subject of discussion in the Church. Since the time of Augustine they have been taken to mean that Adam and Eve were created as physical beings with a sexual dimension to their nature. Sexuality as part of creation, is at best, not a pure 'good'. The event of the 'fall' casts its long shadow over human sexuality, particularly women's sexuality. Sometimes considered ontologically inferior to men by nature, sometimes only relegated to that place as punishment for her primacy in sin, woman is, as the bearer of children, more sexual and therefore more shame based than men.

The patristic writers understand genital sexuality as a product of lust, derived from man's punishment for sin. Sexuality possesses the core of the 'fallen' person, and needs to be expunged. Women, with their overt sexuality, are most in need of this cleansing from sexuality. Clearly sexuality, in this sense, is neither sacred nor affective.

On a purely societal level, sexuality was a source of suffering to many (particularly women). The obligation to bear children early and often brought physical pain and even premature death. Household routines were taxing, and hierarchical structures dunning. Sexual renunciation, tied as it was to freedom from social oppression and physical pain, easily became a sign of a 'heavenly life' of prayer and communion with God. The fanatical desire to rid oneself of

sexuality, even gender, created isolation, as persons became terrified of others who might stir their inner passions.

Celibacy, a state of saintliness, was also a condition of sexlessness, isolation, and rigorous asceticism. Once known as the state in which one is freest to encounter the world, celibacy became an inward journey away from the world, of little use for the kingdom at large. Motivated largely by desires for personal holiness, purity and eternal reward, the celibate disengaged from society and sought a mystical life with Jesus alone. Later the institution of the Church embraced the celibate ideal and required it of their clergy. Tying repudiation of sexuality to the attainment of spiritual freedom and authority, the celibacy of an uncooperative clergy was often a facade. Violations were rampant, causing some to determine that the injunction of celibacy was itself the cause of sexual sin among the clergy.

The Protestant reformation brought needed change to the Christian theology of human sexuality. Now understood as a 'good', sexuality was re-instated to a place of dignity. This 'good', however, was understood only genitally, and hidden in marriage. Sexuality is relegated to an act, (the "act of marriage" as it has become known in Protestant evangelical writings of the 20th Century), and is seldom discussed as a valuable element of the human person. Teaching about human sexual 'intercourse' filled with possibilities for human warmth and compassion without genital involvement would have completed the redemption of human sexuality. Sadly this did not happen. The idea of sexuality

expressed in a *holy* manner *outside of marriage* cannot be conceived of, even to this day, because of lingering suspicions that sexuality in human persons is directly linked to sinfulness.

Even so, celibacy is the villain in Reform theology of human sexuality. Rejecting celibacy's claim to be a path to God through ascetic activity and sexual repression, the reformers did not rediscover its original kingdom purposes of freedom and usefulness.

Stressing the naturalness of the relationship between man and wife, and the blessedness of bearing Christian offspring and serving God through the home, Reformers laid an ax to the foundations of monasticism. Freed from the convent through the redemption of sexuality, woman was then effectively tied to the home, where she lived in submission to a husband and worked to care for the children.

Although the missionary movement of the late 1800's, and early 1900's was a brilliant exception to the relegation of women to the home, to this day there still persists a deep-seated distrust of women in the church of Protestantism. In light of the extensively scarred tradition which cradles this church, one is led to conclude that the issue is tied to an unacknowledged distortion of the understanding of women's sexual nature, and human sexuality in general.

The Gospels and the Book of Acts portray women in important and varied roles, but the current consensus remains that women are not on equal status with men. A haze of shame hovers over issues of sexuality, and women still bear quiet suspicion based on their sexuality. Now that homosexual activity has grown in

prominence, single men, too, are finding themselves increasingly in a cloud of mistrust because they are sexual persons. A quality person, it seems, *will be* married.

3. Summary

An unacknowledged blend of tradition and culture is a dangerous cocktail. Even as the culture uncovers sexuality and reduces it to animal level, in a strange twist it also mystifies genital sexuality as a spiritual encounter. Because of her weak theology of sexuality, the Church is puzzled and confused at the rampant meshing of spirituality and sexuality into a 'new' pagan religion. The voice of the Church has been silenced by bewilderment at a time when much needs to be said.

Individual Christians living in the late twentieth century cannot escape the barrage of sexual stimulation presented daily by many mediums. Living in the midst of this sexual pervasiveness, the Christian often experiences a sense of inner shame, condemning even the stirring of inner emotions as being complicit in a great evil. An evangelical pastor recently spoke of his teenage salvation experience, in which he was certain his greatest sin was his sexuality, even though he had not yet become sexually active. The conflation of culture and Christianity triggered sexual shame and guilt in him, simply because he was a male, and therefore a sexual person. Coming before God, he perceived his sexuality to be unclean.

When sexuality is perceived by culture as a physical act only, detached from the soul, it is easily genitalized and vulgarized. Genital sexual activity is the

right and the necessity for every healthy person, so says society. Denying anyone an active sex life is unreasonable. This being accepted, where can a Christian act out their sexuality? Only in marriage. If sexuality *must* be expressed genitally, and the only permissible venue is marriage, then the logical conclusion is that marriage is the superior lifestyle, and the healthiest and maturest way to be whole. In this setting alone -- hidden -- sexuality can be safely expressed. Apart from marriage, one is (it follows) incomplete and prone to all kinds of sinful stirrings and acts.

Sexual issues are covered in silence in many churches. Too often the quilt of silence cloaks serious, undetected sexual sin in homes and families within the Church. Hidden in marriage and away from scrutinizing eyes, sexual relationships can mutate and deform. The incidences of incest, rape, homosexual deviances, and unplanned pregnancy continue to rise in evangelical churches. Too often exposure of such sins happens only during a crisis, after which the family can choose to slip off to another church in order to bury their secret while still maintaining their spiritual position.

While the Church maintains its prohibitions and teaching on abstinence, with strong calls for a decision of the 'will' against one's sexual impulses, the single person daily faces incredible loneliness. The unfulfilled human urge for union can be so strong as to render one deeply depressed. Because a westerner has a predisposition toward 'moral entrepreneuralism' there is a solution. Without denying the standard or fighting against the dogmas of the Church, one can simply

excuse them self based on their own deep human need, and choose sexual genital activity outside marriage. The residue of shame persists, but can be put aside.

As people plod from day to day desperate for passion and meaning, longing for spirituality, human connection and transcendence, the Church too often responds with cognitive answers. Rarely does a theology of *affective* sexuality emerge. The essential need for intimacy that is part of the celibate life receives too little validation. Church life that centers strongly on marriage is hampered in developing a 'family of God' mentality where marrieds and celibates are partners and equals in kingdom ventures. The positive strengths of celibate lives are effectively lost to the Church who does not affirm and empower the single lifestyle.

A theology of sexuality that denies sexuality to large numbers of people is impotent. Human persons are sexual, and spiritual. One does not have to choose between the two. A commitment to refrain from genital love need not mean isolation. The creation of two sexes, meant for each other, indicates that persons were not intended to live in self-sufficiency and isolation, married or single. Humans need to live in 'belongingness'. "Celibacy must not hinder free and healthy relationships between the sexes." (Goergen 44)

The problems of life and longings of heart are not present because of marriage or singleness. They are part of the human experience, tailored to individual situations by the details of life. Genital sexual activity does not 'heal' life. A person moving toward wholeness may or may not be genitally engaged.

But the *affective* expressions of sexuality build solidarity and community. Certainly the church could be strengthened by a healthy dose of both.

REFLECTIVE CONCLUSIONS

This study is an attempt to understand human sexuality and the Christian celibate life from a theological perspective. Of necessity, it has also touched upon marriage and the value of womanhood, since these two issues wend their way through Christian theologies of sexuality. The Church is the context of the discussion and also the context of the praxis.

Celibacy has been understood, at different times, to be a *charism*, an option, an obligation and a sin. Likewise, human sexuality has been believed to be a gift from God, a 'post-fall' evidence of death needing to be expunged, a tolerable good for the purpose of procreation, and an essential part of the nature of humankind which must be hidden in marriage.

In the Protestant evangelical church, theologies of human sexuality and celibacy still retain shreds of all these understandings. The centuries old struggle to reconcile bodily life and spiritual life remains part of the Christian puzzle. To separate the body from spiritual life is to isolate one's faith from daily living. Jesus himself "shared the human frame, and as for all human beings, his body was the focal point of his life" (Willard 29). One key to living a Christian in the fullest sense is "immersing and persisting in the overall style of life that characterized Jesus" (Willard 28).

> Living as Jesus Christ lived, *in persona Christi*, [means] preaching the gospel; relying totally on God; offering healing and reconciliation, rejecting laws, customs, conventions that place persons beneath rules; resisting temptation; praying

> constantly; eating with modern-day lepers and other outcasts; embracing the enemy and the sinner; dying for the sake of the gospel if it is God's will. . [It] means living according to the power and the presence of the Holy Spirit; training the eyes of the heart on God's face and name proclaimed before us . . . responding to God in faith, hope and love; eventually becoming unrestrictedly united with God. . . [It] means living together in harmony and communion with every other creature in the common household of God . . . (LaCugna 401)

To do this one must have a healthy attitude toward their body, understand sexuality affectively as well as genitally, and live their life in full consciousness of the inbreaking kingdom of God.

Both Jesus and Paul speak of the *charism* of celibacy. Gifted by God, this chosen group of saints is set apart to a lifetime of singleness for the sake of the kingdom of God. Most of the singles in the Protestant church, however, know no such calling -- and indeed *fear* the possibility of this calling! They are single, not by choice or *charism,* but by the vicissitudes of life. Many long for a partner, a companion and spiritual friend who will travel life's road alongside them. Surprisingly, Christian teaching on the celibate life has much to offer a person who has not chosen their singleness. Whether one has a permanent calling, or abides in the single state without the *charism,* singleness can be a rich experience, and useful for the kingdom.

The choice to willingly set aside genital relations as an act of complete submission to God is not a choice toward emotional isolation, as many fear. The celibate person, empowered toward a well-integrated life within an embracing community can be fulfilled and productive. As an empowering community, the Church must give attention to the following key issues.

1. Human Sexuality

A healthy view of sexuality is a requirement for robust living, married or single. Denial, embarrassment, or shame of one's sexuality in any situation is detrimental to personal wholeness and interpersonal intimacy. The Christian virtue of *chastity* begins with healthy sexual acceptance, and then brings moderation and order into the sexual life so as to Christianize it.

> A chaste person has a healthy attitude towards his or her sexuality. A chaste person has a good feeling about his maleness or her femaleness and about his or her sexual responses. A chaste person has an ability to relate bodily on a sexual level. A chaste person exhibits kindness, understanding, openness, and imagination. A person who is uncomfortable being sexual is not chaste. Chastity begins with sexual acceptance. (Goergen 98)

Assaulted by the flood of flagrant images of physical sexuality churned out by society, the Church has too often taken a stand on moral high-ground and decried sexuality itself. When sexuality is denied its inherent grace and covered with shame, something essentially human is lost. Certainly misused and grossly distorted at times, human sexuality is still much more than a lust desire. The drive toward union, longing for others, and the call out of isolation are sown into sexuality.

To the secular community sexuality is a physical, (primarily genital) force. Like the need for food, so the need for sexual expression demands fulfillment if one is to be well. In a sense this philosophy is correct. Human sexuality, when understood in a broader sense than purely physical, is indeed a drive that when fulfilled contributes to wellness. But it is the *affective* expression of sexuality, the

capacity for transcendence and for relationship, that most promotes wellness. Human persons are created for intimacy with other human persons. When sexuality becomes 'eucharistic' (a divine gift) it enables a person to "live from and for others" (La Cugna 407).

"Sexual life is the most conspicuous way that human beings express themselves both as persons and as persons who naturally seek communion." (LaCugna 406) To be human is to be a sexual person. More than sexual differentiation or genital activity, sexuality is inscribed in one's very personhood. "[I]ndistinguishable both from personal identity and from our uniqueness as persons," (LaCugna 407), sexuality cannot be exorcised as a demon of the ungodly. In a large sense, it is at the heart of creation, and it keeps alive the communion of persons (La Cugna 407).

Even so, for the believer, 'kingdom life' must take precedent over 'sexual life'. Receiving the gift of one's sexuality as a divine provision for life and loving does not suggest one must be controlled by it. The serious believer's sexuality is subordinate to kingdom values and kingdom needs. This is accomplished not by denial or fear filled struggles of reason and will against sexual impulses, but by "gaining another *bond* to which [one's] existence is tied, which in turn will replace the [sexual] desire with another kind of mindset, another kind of seeking (*phronein*)" (Thielicke 75). The context of a divine/human *relationship* is the bedrock for life in the kingdom of God which experiences "I -- thou" relationships

among human persons. Human sexuality is not to be struggled against, but channeled into healthy intimate relationships of all kinds.

Thielicke makes a strong point that it is *never enough* to exert the will in order to control sexual temptation. Experience proves him too right. Christians young and old, who believe strongly that they must not be overtaken by sexual sin still fall, repeatedly. Thielicke argues that the person who is "related simply and solely to sexuality" will fall into *sarx*, but the person who is bonded in another direction will be able to be shaped by that new bond (Thielicke 76). Only a complete reorientation of life (toward God and the kingdom) can provide the human person with the power for chaste living.

2. Celibacy

The way in which a person lives out their life is their statement of faith. The lifestyle in particular is not as important as the thing to which it points. When a Christian has embraced a vocation of loving and following Jesus, this becomes the source from which the creative variations of their life flow. Marriage and singleness, then, are not so different as one might assume. Sharing a heart full of love for God, and a passion for service in the kingdom of God, both are valid responses to Christ's call. With this understanding, one could sustain a move from one life's situation to the other without any sense of loss of vocation.

Christian marriage is as abnormal to society as is the celibate life. Both serve as a sign to the world and a sacrament within the Church. The illusion that celibacy reaps a harvest of spiritual goods and marriage reaps a lifetime of human

satisfaction is blatantly false (Goergen 107, 108). In Christian marriage and celibate life God displays a mystery -- "a transparency which has behind it a spiritual reality which shines through it and fills it with meaning" (Thielicke 125).

"A sacrament is a sign of a holy thing, insofar as it sanctifies man." (Thomas Aquinas, *De Sacramentis in Communi,* 3, q.60 a.2) Sacrament embeds the supernatural in the "medium of the natural" (Thielicke 127). Sacraments "empower us to live in right relationship with God, with ourselves and with others" (LaCugna 404). LaCugna suggests the sanctifying process be understood from the perspective of "relational ontology", effecting a transformation not in *substance* but in *person*. "Personal transformation and renewal, a new capacity for relationships, so that our true nature may be more perfectly expressed" is what sacramental life is about (LaCugna 404).

As a sacrament, celibate life has (at least) three interconnected dimensions (Goergen 111,112). First, as a commitment to a journey after God, the celibate life proclaims a joyful hope for the coming kingdom of God. With the priority of active participation in Jesus' reign on earth, Christ's presence is kept alive. Related more to the spiritual life than to sexual renunciation, the celibate person declares by their creative lifestyle that the *bond* with God and His kingdom is itself their vocation.

Secondly, the celibate life is a life of freedom. Interior and exterior freedom are present when life is simplified. As unencumbered daughters and sons of the kingdom, celibate persons have a powerful opportunity to move from prayer

to service and back to prayer in a healthy rhythm. Discipline is required to resist the entertainments and recreations that keep simplicity at bay.

The growing number of single adults in the Christian church has the potential of birthing a new venue of missionary activity, a new kind of "celibate order". Called into service for a period of life, a defined time, teams of celibate missionaries could be blessed by the church and released to tasks world wide. Once again the celibate life would be distinctly profitable for God's kingdom and Christ's reign on earth. The vision for such a venture must go beyond the scope of simply engaging young single adults in short term missions. The mature adult, complete with a sexual history which might be marred, is also a viable candidate.

A third element is the sign of protest. Celibacy (as does Christian marriage) stands against the "encroaching secular value system" (Goergen 112). The celibate is willing to live in the tension between secular values and kingdom values by living a restrained life in an unrestrained world. Daily challenging the status quo simply by uniqueness of life, the celibate affirms that love, not orgasm is the goal of sexuality, and God, not comfort is the goal of man (Goergen 112). The witness of the celibate life is the joyful presence of the *person*, not the celibacy itself.

The rich life of the celibate stands within the church as a sacrament, signifying the life of Christ, the power of the Spirit and the blessing of the Father. Within the world it shines as a unique sign of faith, freedom and protest.

Everywhere it counters the common stream of human experience, but must not dwell apart from human intimacy.

3. Celibate Relationships

Loving relationships are essential to holy living. Celibate lives are no exception. History has many examples: Francis of Assisi and Claire, Catherine of Siena and Raymond of Capua, Jordan of Saxony and Diana, Aelred of Rievaulx and his two friends Waldef and Walter Daniel, John of the Cross and Theresa of Avila. The apparent dangers of 'celibate love' have kept the issue of 'soul friendship' largely off the table in Protestant circles. Ideas of intimacy immediately conjure up images of genital love. Men and women (married or single) are not encouraged in friendship with each other, and single sex relationships are often viewed as potentially homosexual. But there is no genuine happiness in isolation.

Those who have set aside genital relationships still have great needs for intimacy. Sexuality is a feature of personhood, even celibate personhood. There is no such thing as a truly 'platonic' or non-sexual relationship. If two persons have a relationship it is in some dimension sexual, since the persons themselves are sexual. When a man and a woman have a relationship, it is heterosexual. The relationship between two persons of common gender is a homosexual relationship. Neither precludes genital sexuality, nor do they command it. The tendency for a relationship to become genital is a human tension, but not fated. A long term, affective sexual relationship will have strong emotional bonds, and like any

relationship will need ongoing care and watchfulness. But there is no other option that will suffice.

> In the last resort it is better to run the risk of an occasional scandal than to have a monastery -- a choir, a refectory, a recreation room -- full of dead men. Our Lord did not say, "I am come that ye may have safety, and have it more abundantly." Some of us would indeed give anything to feel safe, about our life in this world or the next, but we cannot have it both ways: safety or life, we must choose. (Gerald Vann, *To Heaven with Diana*, pg. 51-52, quoted in Goergen 173)

Quentin Hakenewerth suggests six symptoms that a celibate friendship has become unhealthy: a strong pull toward genital expressions of love; when exclusivity becomes more important than community; excessive possessiveness; loss of freedom to respond openly in the relationship; loss of fellowship with the community of Christ because of emotionally involvement; loss of interest in prayer (Hakenewerth 30 - 37).

Inherent in any interpersonal relationship is potential joy and pain. One issue of grief that celibate friends can expect is the pain of separation. Celibate love does not include a commitment of physical presence for life (Goergen 174). The celibate person risks the loss of dear ones as an ever presence sense of death. Donald Goergen, celibate, writes of a friend, "The experience of no longer being physically present to a close friend reveals to me that this other person is indeed part of me. . . [My] experience is that a friend is more a part of us than the physical parts of our body" (176). Goergen adds, "To be a Christian is to experience the paradox of death and separation while believing in resurrection and rebirth" (176). Augustine speaks poignantly of the loss of a friend:

> My heart was made dark by sorrow, and whatever I looked upon was death. . . My eyes sought for him on every side, and he was not given to them. . . I marveled that other men should live, because he, whom I loved as if he would never die, was dead. I marveled more that I, his second self, could live when he was dead. Well has someone said of his friend that he is half of his soul. For I thought that my soul and his soul were but one soul in two bodies. Therefore, my life was a horror to me, because I would not live but as a half.
> (Augustine, *Confessions*, Book 4, Chapters 4 - 6)

Soul friendships are significant and complex. Rather than standing in a place of judgment or passivity, the community of Christ -- the Church -- must become the empowering environment for such relationships to prosper and grow. The Church can 'stand guard' over such relationships, fostering openness. It is in the dark hidden places that unhealthy secrets flourish. Celibate persons share the human longing to be included, known, heard, and understood. The *household of faith* is sanctuary where "God and creature meet and unite and now exist together as one" (LaCugna 411). It is here in the 'kitchen' of God's kingdom that married and celibate persons must sit together to process life, embrace lives, and share secrets. Only in the context of this kind of human intimacy can a life flow with 'living water' that spills outward.

Celibate life was never intended to be introspective and solitary. It is modeled in the lives of Jesus and Paul as an outward looking life, rich with the rewards of private and public ministry. In fact, service for the kingdom is Paul's primary motivation for choosing singleness. No lifestyle is easy, because life itself is not easy. As LaCugna so succinctly states, "So much of life painfully awaits

completion" (410). But within the community of faith the complexities of life are eased by the harmony and communion of loving, empowering relationships.

4. Issues of Church Polity and Praxis

The authority structures in Protestant evangelicalism too often shape the ministry rigidly and institutionally, rather than fluidly and charismatically. The flow of ministry is thus intentionally dammed up and allowed only to trickle, all in the name of 'maintaining standards'. Ecclesiastical authorities need to seriously consider creatively easing boundaries around ministries for and from single persons.

The Christian and Missionary Alliance has, over the years, moved away from its 'holiness roots' into a cognitive, reform position in theology and praxis. This has, necessarily, affected the theology of sexuality and understanding of women's place. Once a missionary movement that thrived on the gifts and work of godly (often single), women leaders, pastors, and missionaries, the C&MA now has no women in places of conspicuous leadership. Young women in Bible Colleges (even during the winter of 1998) are discretely talked to about the necessity of marriage to find a fulfilling role of ministry. The issue of women in leadership is a constant battle at the biennial General Assembly. No women sit on the Board of Directors, nor are they allowed to hold the position of Senior Pastor. Single women who seek pastoral roles are most often relegated to secondary roles working with children or teens. A woman with pastoral gifts of preaching, teaching, or spiritual mentoring has a difficult time finding a paid position. The

woman with the most influence in the church is still the pastor's wife, making her the evangelical equivalent of the 'religious sister'.

The move toward boundary laden, hierarchical reform theology within the C&MA has resulted in the practical exclusion of a robust understanding of singleness for the sake of the kingdom. Marriage is the norm, and singleness the anomaly. Symptoms of this thinking abound. Single people are seldom found in significant leadership roles. Teaching on the significance of celibate living is virtually non-existent. Those who find themselves single for a second time (after a divorce) are viewed in a particularly dim light. To have failed in marriage, wherever the blame lies, is a permanent disqualification from leadership. Such persons are not allowed to participate in church leadership at board or pastoral levels. In some churches lesser leadership roles are also denied these people. Experience has proved that these positions and practices are not at all unusual in Protestant evangelical churches.

A heavy focus on families within the church can easily isolate the single person. The evangelical sub-culture rightly values marriage and family, but has not opened its mind to other viable lifestyles. Such openness must be taught. Teaching at all levels of Christian Education needs to include a rich stream of theology on human sexuality. Demands for abstinence must be accompanied by a strong emphasis on affective sexuality. Sexual genital activity outside marriage is not an option for the Christian, but the quiet harboring of fear toward same sex friendships, the breeding of personal shame about sexuality, and the conflation of

intimacy and genital activity is also crippling. Authentic human intimacy, including tactility, must move up in Christian life values. Relationships, when initiated, enjoyed, and nurtured in the open, will find safety. Women and men must be free to talk together on non-threatening, level ground, without suspicion. Single women need to interact with men, and single men need to communicate with women.

The Church must become intentional about making *community* a priority, shaping themselves as a *household of faith*, and not simply a *group of families* into which singles are awkwardly fit. A true *household of faith* will be marked by a spirit of openness, security, authentic spirituality, and relational trustworthiness. In such a place persons at any place in life will find love and belonging.

The needs of single persons must be considered when programming is developed. Spiritual mentoring and openings for ministry will provide dignity and honor for singles in local churches. These initiatives must be intentional. Investment into lives of single celibate persons holds the promise of great fruitfulness. Not only will *saints* develop within the body of Christ, but emergent ministries will stimulate the church.

The years of singleness need not be barren and lonely. No one in the kingdom of God lives outside the promise of abundant life.

Step then
from the staid and somber line.
Move out in dancing
Into dreams so daring;
without them you will settle for the road
that wanders by and winds to nowhere. (author unknown)

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